

## Multilingualism in the governance of a 'monolingual' institution: an explorative study on linguistic diversity and language practices in the University of Hamburg

Tobias Schroedler

To cite this article: Tobias Schroedler (2018): Multilingualism in the governance of a 'monolingual' institution: an explorative study on linguistic diversity and language practices in the University of Hamburg, International Journal of Multilingualism, DOI: [10.1080/14790718.2018.1520237](https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2018.1520237)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2018.1520237>



Published online: 15 Sep 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 48



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



# Multilingualism in the governance of a 'monolingual' institution: an explorative study on linguistic diversity and language practices in the University of Hamburg

Tobias Schroedler

Faculty of Education, University of Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany

## ABSTRACT

This paper describes and discusses findings from an explorative study on multilingualism among university staff. In a project conducted in the University of Hamburg, 661 members of staff in administrative and technical roles have participated in a survey on their multilingual repertoires, on the usage of different languages as well as multilingual language practices in their daily work routine. The theoretical framework is informed by economic considerations on the value of languages (Grin, F. (2003). *Language planning and economics. Current Issues in Language Planning*, 4(1), 1–66) as well as sociolinguistic work on language and employability (Duchêne, A., & Heller, M. (Eds.). (2012). *Routledge critical studies in multilingualism: Vol. 1. Language in late capitalism: Pride and profit*. New York: Routledge; Piller, I. (2016). *Linguistic diversity and social justice: An introduction to applied sociolinguistics* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press). Among other things, the descriptive statistics firstly exhibit a wide range of multilingual resources within the workforce with over 60 different languages that are spoken by the participants. Secondly, an extensive and regular usage of languages other than German (LOTG) can be seen with over 75% of the participants indicating to make regular use other languages at work. Thirdly, generally positive attitudes towards the usage of LOTG can be observed. Further analysis and a critical discussion, however, reveals that LOTG usage remains limited to using English in the vast majority of instances, reinforcing the hegemonic role of English (and in some cases French, Spanish and Italian) and disregarding actual linguistic diversity and migrant languages.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 8 September 2017

Accepted 1 September 2018

## KEYWORDS

Multilingualism; institutional multilingualism; value of languages; language status

## 1. Introduction

Research on multilingualism in institutions has received increasing attention in recent years. While studies on multilingualism in private sector companies still dominate the field, an uptake of analyses of languages in public institutions is observable (Gazzola, 2016; Grin & Gazzola, 2013). Research on multilingualism in universities, however, is to this day relatively rare. To the knowledge of the authors, there is one study from Monash University Melbourne in which multilingualism among university staff has been

discussed (Marriott, 2013). In this study, Marriott provides an overview of what role languages other than English play in the university's administration. Besides English, she describes, it is mostly the Chinese languages that are spoken by the employees and that are used in intercultural communication scenarios between administrative staff and students. In Europe, no systematic study has yet mapped, described or explored this matter. This paper therefore aims to shed light on what role multilingualism plays within the University of Hamburg. The project's key aim was to gather some first data on the linguistic texture of the members of the university. The data that were analysed in this paper are hence explorative in nature and the analytical procedures remain, for now, relatively descriptive. The outlook in the final section of this paper will draw attention to the potential of this field of research and to analytical steps that could follow in the future.

Discussing research on multilingualism in higher education has a number of social and pragmatic implications. Amongst other issues, social elitism, educational reproduction and social mobility can be considered relevant. While an in-depth discussion of these matters is considered beyond the scope of this paper, it is arguably relevant to a discussion of multilingualism in the university. Briefly summarised, one finds evidence that, firstly, in the general student population of German universities, individuals of migrant background are underrepresented and are significantly less successful (Berthold & Leichsenring, 2012). Secondly, it has repeatedly been established that Germany is considered mediocre when it comes to social mobility (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung, 2016). Thirdly, for many decades German educational institutions have been criticised for their monolingual habitus in the multilingual reality, in which they exist and function (Gogolin, 1994). Observations of linguistic diversity in third level educational institutions in the German context therefore hold great potential for a better understanding of the contrast between the stereotypical monolingual institution and multilingual reality of its environment.

Among several streams of research on the value of multilingualism and institutional multilingualism, the immediately following section on relevant theory focuses, in its first part, on Grin's concepts of economic value of languages. Further relevant work from sociolinguists on other conceptions of linguistic value, including issues such as commodification of language skills is presented in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding regarding the role and value of languages on the job market. Following this, the methodology section will introduce the project on multilingualism in the higher education institution, in which the data for this paper were collected. The analysis then presents all relevant descriptive statistics that emerged from the data, and discusses those in relation to the aforementioned theories wherever applicable. Finally, the summarising section provides concluding remarks whilst also drawing attention to the limitations of this study as well as future research desiderata.

As a final introductory remark, it shall be clarified that the small sample size and the descriptive nature of the collected data can hardly be compared to larger conventional data collections, yet it allows interesting and possibly innovative exploration of multilingualism in the administration of an educational institution. Also, it seems plausible that the field of study (the city of Hamburg and its university) can, to some extent, be regarded as a surrogate and benchmark for comparison for many other European cities and institutions.

## 2. Theory

The theoretical framework of this paper is composed of research and theoretical constructs originating from a number of different disciplines. It will, therefore, be subdivided into three different parts. The immediately following section will provide a very brief overview of our understanding of multilingualism and linguistic diversity. Clarifying the concept of multilingualism as well as providing insights into the local linguistic environment will help to maintain a clear focus in the presentation and analysis of our research. In a second part, the theoretical framework will explain some of the key notions in economic understanding of the value of language and concepts of linguistic capital. Given that the later data analysis focuses on multilingualism among employees, further literature on language and employability as well as sociolinguistic value conceptions is reviewed in Section 2.3.

### *2.1. Linguistic diversity, multilingualism and the local environment*

The concept of multilingualism, or multilingualism as a research subject, differs widely in the understanding of different research streams and disciplines. This section very briefly clarifies our understanding of multilingualism within more general concepts of linguistic diversity. Multilingualism first describes the coexistence of different languages in its conventional sense as tools for communication and cognition. This includes both the individual and the societal level. On the individual level, we consider a person to be multilingual if he or she speaks, writes, reads or is able to understand more than one language at any competence level. On a societal level, we consider a specific population or group of people multilingual if more than one language is used for private, public or professional communication on a regular basis (Lengyel, 2017). What is important to define on both the individual and the societal level, is the question of the origin of the multiple languages. There are three main reasons for the coexistence of languages in most societies and many individuals. The first one is the historic coexistence of one or more regional language(s) and one or several dominant, often national, language(s). The second major cause for individual and societal multilingualism is education. Apart from very few examples, everyone going through mainstream education in Germany has had at least five and often nine or more years of English as a modern foreign language in school. Beyond this, all high school leavers have received substantial education in a second and sometimes third foreign language. These include, but are not limited to (in order of popularity), French, Spanish, Latin and Russian. Despite the fact that modern foreign language education in secondary schooling has a comparatively prominent place, the role of English in the educational, professional and public sphere is by far the most dominant – as it is in many Western societies (Coulmas, 2008). The extent of this omnipresence of English will be addressed later in the data analysis. The third major cause for widespread multilingualism in a given population is migration and mobility.

Hamburg as a big city and metropolitan area has experienced societal changes (with regard to immigration as well as in demographic and economic terms), that can probably be compared to the situation in many other European cities. Particularly in recent years, many central European metropolitan areas have undergone extensive and rapid changes with regard to their ethnical, cultural and linguistic diversity. While migration

and mobility are by no means new phenomena, the last decade has brought both extensive (forced) migration and a new dimension of (voluntary) hypermobility. Like many other urban areas, Hamburg is home to migrants from nearly every recognised country in the world. While we know that migrants from approximately 190 countries live in the city, there is no data on how many languages are spoken. Moreover, it is known that approximately 30% of the population has a migrant background and that nowadays approximately 50% of children are born into families in which at least one parent has a migrant background (Statistisches Amt für Hamburg und Schleswig-Holstein, 2016). This shows that diversity in the city is not only very heterogeneous in itself, but represents a numerically large proportion of the overall population.

In immediate relevance to our research, the lack of data on (relatively) precise numbers of languages in our population inspired us to actually collect data in our survey on how many languages are spoken at what level of proficiency (see: Methodology). In the later data analysis we will to some extent differentiate between traditional migrant languages and the usage of foreign languages that are (most likely) a result of modern foreign language learning in secondary education. Regardless of the acquisition background of people's language repertoires, the study at hand aims to describe and discuss multilingualism in the workplace. Just like in the private sector, a university as an employer strives for an effective and economic usage of its employees' skills. The immediately following section therefore introduces concepts on the economic value of languages including the framework of Human Capital Theory.

## ***2.2. Economic concepts on the value of languages***

Before turning to sociolinguistic theory on language and employment, some selected notions on how to conceptualise linguistic capital or the value of language(s) will be outlined in this section. This shall include Grin's economic work on the value of language(s) as well as more general contributions.

In a very general understanding, (Barnes, 2006) conceptualised language as a common good. That, in its broadest sense, means that language belongs to everyone. Different streams of literature, or rather, different disciplines have taken closer looks at the matter. One major stream of theory when discussing the value of languages originates from economists, who have conducted a great deal of research on the value of language skills on the job market (Dustmann, 1994; Grin, 1994; Vaillancourt, 1980). Especially through relating Human Capital Theory to language education and development, it has been shown that there is monetary value in speaking particular languages within particular markets (Chiswick & Miller, 1995, 2007; Eide & Showalter, 2010). As one of the most influential authors in the area of language economics, François Grin has established the notions of market value and non-market value of languages (Grin, 1994, 1997, 2002, 2003, 2006). When discussing these two concepts and using them to describe languages, it is, first of all, important to stress that both non-market and market value are positive notions. Broadly paraphrased, this means that a language has a market value, if it helps an individual in creating monetary profit (i.e. sell goods to people that would not be sold without speaking the particular language or simply earning more because one speaks the language in question). Non-market value, on the other hand, is concerned with the individual preference structure and describes the way individuals value a

language for purposes such as access to culture, social contact, etc. (Grin, 2002, p. 20). On the subject of the non-market value of languages, Grin further explains that this can be extended to questions of general linguistic diversity (i.e. people may simply value linguistic diversity which surrounds them) (Schroedler, 2018, pp. 11–13). Applied to the study at hand, this means (a) that there may be value in the appreciation of multilingualism in the workplace, (b) that attitudes towards multilingualism (according to employer's demand & employee's repertoire) are important to discuss, and (c) that proficiency in certain languages may provide speakers with certain advantages on the job.

Moreover, in more recent work, Grin has discussed language policy making at universities. In close regard to higher education institutions, Grin (2015) describes that universities play an important role in our society. He claims that the role of universities goes beyond their academic research and teaching duties, and that broader responsibilities of the institutions include their contributions to society (i.e. social justice, advancing democracy, ensuring economic growth). All this holds relevance to linguistic diversity and multilingual functioning. Universities have to take account of societal changes such as the skyrocketed linguistic diversity in our present-day society. This implies that '[u]niversities are [not only] shaped by, but also contribute to shaping their linguistic environment' (Grin, 2015, p. 102). Based on this, it can be argued that for a fair and efficient functioning of a university, it needs to recognise societal and institutional linguistic diversity. Moreover, universities need to make informed choices regarding the language usage in the research it produces, the teaching it offers, the societal responsibilities it responds to, and finally, also in its governance and administration. In this paper, Grin hints at newer concepts of efficiency and fairness in institutional language policy and practice. As it will be briefly discussed in a later section of this paper, an evaluation of these concepts could be a valuable addition to the analysis of language practices at university.

### ***2.3. Sociolinguistic work on the role of languages and the job market***

In addition to Grin's and his associates' concepts on the economic value of languages, there is an important line of research that forwards a more critical and detailed discussion of language matters and the job market. A number of sociolinguists have contributed to the discussion through individual, ethnographic and often case-based studies. Resulting from numerous studies, influential, theory-building work on language and capitalism has emerged.

Duchêne and Heller (2012), for example, illustrate that value concepts of language in the capitalist context have shifted away from identity and nation-state building towards neoliberal and utilitarian ideas. Beyond this, in a recent book, Flubacher, Duchêne, and Coray (2018), argue that the interdependence between investment into language learning and a person's employability is too often depicted as a simplistic positive correlation. The authors clarify that in many instances, it is far more important to consider outer circumstances such as the linguistic environment (i.e. dominant languages, issues of linguistic hegemony) as well as other factors such as education, networks and qualifications (Flubacher et al., 2018). Moreover, and in immediate relevance to employability, the authors criticise that language education as a labour market measure does, in many instances, not function. This mirrors results from an earlier study by Del Percio (2018), who demonstrates

that immigrants need to adapt to linguistic behavioural codes and apply strategic communicative modes that help them on the job market.

Hand in hand with the development of these ideas goes work on language commodification. It has been shown that very utilitarian stances on language education have been adopted not only in the tertiary sector (see: Duchêne & Heller, 2012 for explanations on the tertiarization of the economy and the role of language), but also in the primary and secondary sector (Del Percio & van Hoof, 2017; Tabiola & Lorente, 2017). Heller argues that '[c]orporate culture places its own contradictory pressures on the definition of what is to count as valuable linguistic resources' (Heller, 2003, p. 489) in a context, where she discusses uncertainties as to whether authenticity of language use stands above standardisation or vice versa.

Piller (2016) advocates the view that individuals who lack proficiency in the dominant language experience disadvantages or even discrimination on the job market. She further argues that 'linguistic stereotyping' is practiced in employment procedures and that in many workplaces linguistic diversity is suppressed. Moreover, she describes that migrants are persistently excluded from the dominant job market (Piller, 2016, pp. 95–97). These views further question the sheer possibility of a well-functioning, truly multilingual institution where all members have equal chances. Equally to all aforementioned issues in the theory-building work discussed in this section, this will be discussed in relation to the data presented in this paper in later sections.

### 3. Methodology

As part of a larger project on multilingualism in the institution, the project presented in this paper examined the position (or status) of languages other than German (LOTG) in the governance of the University of Hamburg. As indicated above, the data collection on language usage in the university's administration was one of four projects: the other three were concerned with (1) multilingualism in the university hospital's health care, (2) multilingualism among students and (3) multilingualism among teaching and research staff.

With over 42,000 students, the university is one of Germany's largest higher education institutions. The core aims of the study presented here were to examine what role multilingualism plays in the institution's administrative functioning, what resources there are, how they are distributed and what value is given to the multilingual repertoires of its employees. In order to do so, a questionnaire-based survey for all members of staff in administrative, technical, and librarian positions was designed. With 2243 members of staff, this group covers all members of staff who do not work in research or teaching-related positions. The survey was programmed into an online tool called Limesurvey (limesurvey.org), and paper-pencil versions were printed. Through all relevant mailing lists and with the help of a number of assistants, who carefully researched which members of staff do not regularly work at a computer (and hence received paper versions of the questionnaire), we aimed to provide all relevant members of the target group with the opportunity to participate in the survey (see: response rate and sample description further below).

Concerning the content of the questionnaire, we first wanted to map the multilingual repertoire of all participants. In order to receive a comprehensive picture of each



participant's language skills, the first part of the questionnaire asked for all languages one can speak or understand. These (maximum 5) languages were then automatically transferred into five separate self-assessment tables. The design of this self-assessment was widely inspired by the CEFR's can-do descriptors (Council of Europe, 2001; Little, 2006) and were subdivided into the commonly used five language proficiency components (Speaking, Writing, Listening, Reading, Interaction). This CEFR adapted self-assessment of one's language capacity had been developed and tested by the 'Linguistic Diversity in Urban Areas' research cluster prior to the study at hand (Klinger, Duarte, Gogolin, Schnoor, & Trebbels, 2017). The fact that participants were only given the option to indicate competences in a maximum of five languages, was based on an estimation from a small pilot survey, in which none of the 28 participants (same staff group) made use of all five options. In case this study will be reproduced, the number of options should be increased for further methodological advancement. Following the self-assessment of the participants' language repertoire, the second part of the questionnaire aimed at investigating multilingual practices in the participants' daily working routine. Questions included, but were not limited to, 'Do you use languages other than German at work? If so, what languages are these? In what situations?', 'Who (what other status group in the university) do you mainly communicate with during your daily work routine? In what languages?', and 'Would you like to use languages other than German at work more often? If so, what languages?'. The final part of the questionnaire asked its respondents for some limited personal data. For rather strict reasons of research ethics and data protection, the project team was only allowed to insert the following items into the questionnaire: age, gender, schooling (highest certificate); highest certificate of tertiary education, and country in which education has been received.

### **3.1. Sample**

As briefly mentioned above, in the data collection procedure, we carefully aimed at providing every member of staff in the group of administration, technical support and librarians with the opportunity to participate in our survey. Using two different mailing lists, with one invitation to participate and one reminder in each, we ensured that most members of staff received an invitation to respond to our online questionnaire. Prior to and during the 8-week long phase of data collection, a team of research assistants, in cooperation with the university's human resources department, carefully worked on the identification of staff members who do not (or do not regularly) work on their computer. The identified groups of people (i.e. staff members in certain technical roles, certain laboratory assistants), received separate individual invitations to participate, including paper-and-pencil copies of our questionnaire.

The human resources department of the university provided the research team with the official figures and statistics on the relevant staff population. The overall population consists of 2243 members of staff. Out of those, 661 participated (see Table 1). While it is difficult to objectively assess the successfulness of a survey of this type (voluntary, anonymous, online, no rewards/prizes), the response rate of nearly 30% was positively received within the research team.

Taking a closer look at Table 1, it can be seen that the staff population in our sample is a relatively close representation of the official figures. The official university's statistics report



**Table 1.** Sample description.

	Sample Population	Official Population
<b>Overall</b>	661 (29.5%)	2243 (100%)
<b>Sex</b>	female: 72.8% / male: 27.2%	female: 75% / male: 25%
<b>Function: Administrative</b>	394 (59.6%)	1325 (59.1%)
<b>Function: Technical</b>	124 (18.8%)	753 (33.6%)
<b>Function: Librarian</b>	57 (7.7%)	165 (7.4%)
<b>Other Function</b>	23 (3.5%)	n.a.
<b>No response</b>	69 (10.4%)	
<b>Age group &lt;30</b>	10.8%	n.a.
<b>Age group 30–40</b>	28.1%	n.a.
<b>Age group 41–50</b>	31.1%	n.a.
<b>Age group 51–60</b>	25.3%	n.a.
<b>Age group &gt;60</b>	4.7%	n.a.

the gender distribution as 75% female and 25% male, figures of our sample show a close match with 72.8% and 27.2%. The differentiation between the three defined types of roles (administrative, technical and librarian) is slightly more complex. Given that out of 661 participants 69 provided no response and that 23 chose the option ‘Other Function’, the sample analysis was left with only 86.1% of valid responses. The distribution of those looks extremely positive for the representation of the administrative staff (59.6% representation in our sample, 59.1% representation in the official statistics) and for the ratio of librarians in our sample (7.7% in our sample, 7.4% in the official statistics). The group of employees in technical roles, however, remains widely underrepresented (18.8% in our sample, 33.6% in the official statistics). The university does not keep, or did not provide statistics on the age distribution of the relevant staff group. We, therefore, only provide the age group distribution of our sample, which can be described as ‘expectable’.

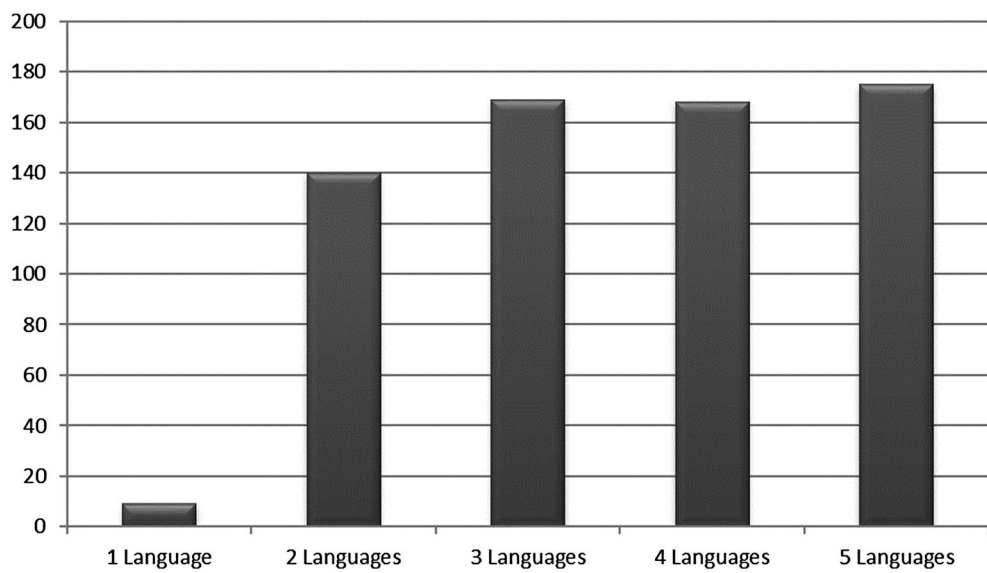
## 4. Analysis

The following three sections will provide an overview of some selected results of our survey. Descriptive statistics will be presented and analysed through the lens of our theoretical framework outlined in Section 2 of this paper. The immediately following section illustrates and discusses data on the multilingual repertoire within the institution’s administration. Following this, Section 4.2 contains data on the role and value of multilingualism in the daily working routine of the staff body.

### 4.1. Mapping the multilingual repertoire

As mentioned earlier in the paper, the first aim of this study was to map the multilingual repertoire of the institution’s staff members. This was necessary in order to assess the relevance and value of multilingual communication in a second step. The first part of the questionnaire in the study at hand, therefore, asked for the number of languages a participant speaks, what languages these are, which of them is (are) the participant’s first language(s) and at what level participants speak each of their languages (see: Methodology).

From Figure 1, it can be seen that 9 participants reported to speak just one language, 140 participants named two languages, 169 participants named three languages, 168



**Figure 1.** Number of languages.

participants named four languages and 175 participants made use of the maximum possible entries of five languages.

Following the indication towards what languages the participants spoke, the questionnaire asked which one(s) of those languages were their mother tongue(s). [Table 2](#) shows that 572 out of 661 participants consider German as their single or shared first language. This may seem a lot at first sight given the large proportion of migrants in the overall society (see: section on Linguistic Diversity). However, 100 participants indicated to either have a single different L1 or consider two languages their mother tongue (table reads as follows: in those lines naming more than one language there were x-number of native speakers in the sample. i.e. Croatian, Czech, Danish, Greek... one native speaker each). Given that due to research ethics constraints, it was not possible to collect any data on our participants' possible migration background, we consider the aforementioned fact of having approximately 100 'non-single-native' speakers of German in our data sample still noteworthy. Excluding the five entries of considering a

**Table 2.** Native speakers.

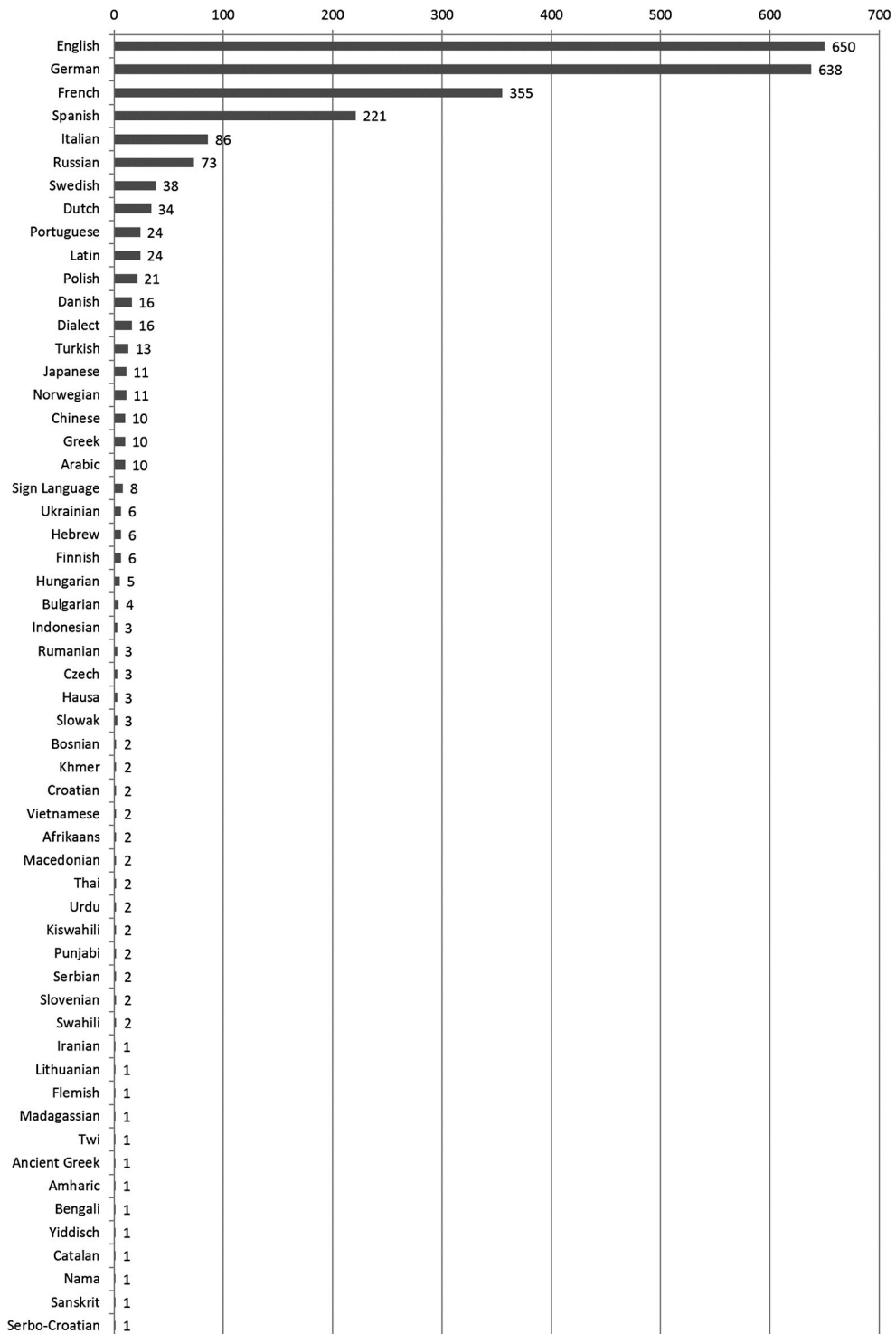
L1	Native Speakers
German	572
English	19
Russian	18
Polish	9
French	7
Spanish	6
Turkish, German Dialect	5
Ukrainian, Portuguese	3
Arabic, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Chinese, Dutch, Hungarian, Punjabi, Sign, Swedish, Swedish,	2
Croatian, Czech, Danish, Greek, Iranian, Italian, Japanese, Khmer, Lithuanian, Madagascan, Macedonian, Norwegian, Rumanian, Turkish,	1

German dialect one's first language, the data tell us that 14.4% of our sample population may have a migrant background (of course, this can only be seen as a vague proxy measure). Knowing that 12.3% of all public sector employees in Hamburg have a migrant family background (Statistisches Amt für Hamburg und Schleswig-Holstein, 2014), our diversity proxy appears relatively representative. This would also, at first sight, indicate that there is no overly negative bias against employing individuals with a migrant background when comparing the figure to the rest of the public sector workforce. When looking at the overall figures mentioned in Section 2.1. (30% migrant background in the city's population), however, both figures (12.3% migrant background in public sector employment and 14.4% in Hamburg's university) paint a different picture. Despite being slightly better than the city average, having only a migrant representation of 14.4% in the administrative staff, mirrors Piller's statement mentioned in Section 2.3 on the persistent exclusion of migrants from the dominant job market (Piller, 2016, p. 96).

Returning to the question of which languages are spoken by the participants, the data show that 60 different languages have been named. By far the most widely known language other than German in the sample was English, which is spoken by 650 out of 661 participants, followed by French (355 entries), Spanish (221), Italian (86) and Russian (73). Figure 2 illustrates all language entries and the number of participants who indicated to speak these.

Beyond naming the languages that the study's participants speak, the survey further included a comprehensive self-assessment part. In this self-assessment, participants were asked to report at what level they spoke each of their languages. Methodologically, the self assessment tables were designed in inspiration from the CEFR can-do descriptors and participants had the possibility to rate their language skills in all five competence areas (Speaking, Writing, Listening, Reading and Interaction). In our calculations, we used scales from 1 to 6 approximately relating to the CEFR competence levels A1-C2 (1 = A1, 2 = A2, 3 = B1, 4 = B2, 5 = C1 and 6 = C2). In Table 3 the results of the self-assessed command of the six most frequently named languages are illustrated.

It can be seen that German is mastered at the highest level and has by far the smallest standard deviation, which in the context of this study can be seen as relatively self-evident. The average score of 4.33 for English (on a scale from 1 to 6), however, is worth mentioning. Finding out in a study like this that English is widely spoken and at a relatively decent level may be seen as predictable. However, remembering that 4 corresponds to B2 level and 5 to C1 level, a score of 4.33 on average among 633 participants in the university's technical and administrative staff, can be considered remarkable. Beyond German and English, the data show relatively similar figures of the average command score and standard deviation of French, Spanish and Italian (all approximately in the middle between A2 and B1). Perhaps most interesting among the languages beyond German and English is Russian. The table shows an average command nearly a full scale point higher than for French, Spanish and Italian. A competence level between B1 and B2, though closer to B1, tells us that Russian is the third best-spoken language in the university. The far higher standard deviation for Russian compared to the other five languages in the table can potentially have two explanations. In simple terms, it can be said that Russian is both a traditional language brought to Germany by migrants from Russian-speaking parts of the world and, secondly, it is a relatively widespread foreign language in secondary education in most parts of former Eastern Germany. This may be an explanation for



**Figure 2.** All language entries.

**Table 3.** Language level.

CATEGORY	N	MEAN	SD	MIN	MAX
<b>GERMAN</b>	608	5.9	0.33	2	6
<b>ENGLISH</b>	633	4.33	1.32	1	6
<b>FRENCH</b>	383	2.61	1.27	1	6
<b>ITALIAN</b>	81	2.39	1.19	1	6
<b>RUSSIAN</b>	67	3.31	1.94	1	6
<b>SPANISH</b>	213	2.55	1.37	1	6

having a considerable number of speakers with a near-native command and numerous speakers with a low to mediocre command resulting from secondary education. An alternative explanation may lie in the nature of the language. One may hypothesise there is a significant number of speakers who speak Russian relatively well, but who are not fully proficient using the Cyrillic script.

In summary, this section has demonstrated that there is a remarkable linguistic diversity among our sample population. Over 30 different L1s and over 60 different languages overall have been identified. What becomes clear, however, is that this reported multilingual repertoire in our sample is unlikely to reflect the overall population's linguistic diversity. A majority of the reported language skills appears to originate from modern foreign language education, which further underlines the previous point. Perhaps most important for the subsequent parts of this paper is the role of English. English is not only the most widely mastered language beyond German, but it is also spoken at a remarkably high proficiency level.

#### **4.2. The role and value of multilingualism in the workplace**

The previous section has provided an overview of the multilingual repertoire of the members of staff in administrative and technical roles at Hamburg University. Over 650 participants gave detailed accounts on questions related to what languages they speak and at what level. This section will now move into the analysis of data related to the role of languages other than German (LOTG) in the participants' daily work routine.

Beginning the description of the role and value of multilingualism at work, our study's participants were asked whether they had frequently used LOTG in their job during the past month. The data analysis shows that a majority of employees regularly do so. With 71.9% of all participants ( $n = 638$ ) indicating 'Yes', it becomes clear that using LOTG for work purposes is rather common. Given the perspective that most universities in Germany like the University of Hamburg are fully state-funded, taking into account that there is a certain monolingual tradition to the German education sector (just like in many other countries in the historic development of the traditional nation-state idea), and considering certain deeply rooted presumptions about bureaucracy and public sector employment in Germany (regarding monolingual, bureaucratic language use), one may argue that this result indicates a surprisingly high and frequent usage of LOTG. On the other hand, one might consider the linguistic superdiversity of our present-day society, the relatively well-functioning modern foreign language education system in Germany and the increasing importance of academic internationalisation activities sufficient reasons to explain the result above.

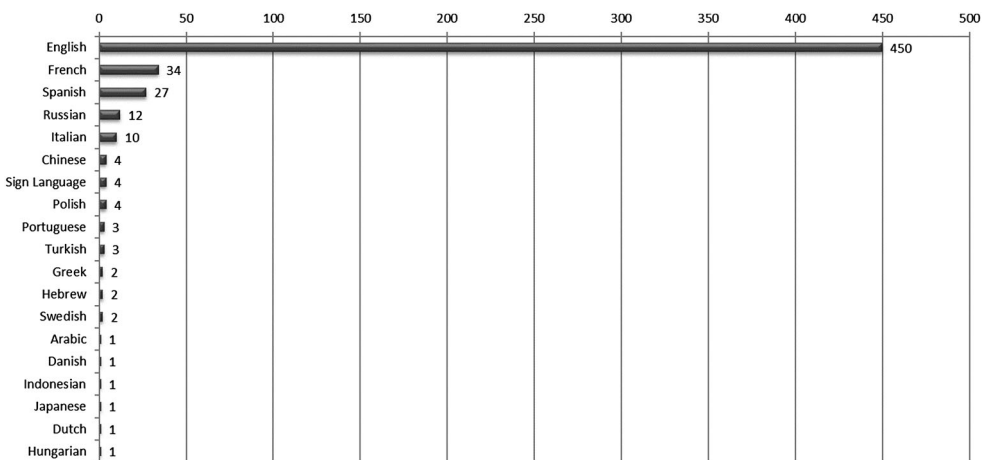
In order to understand the usage of LOTG in the daily work of the university's administration better, the study also asked for the precise languages beyond German that are regularly used for work purposes by the respondents. Figure 3 illustrates that 450 respondents indicated to use English regularly. Seeing French, Spanish, Russian and Italian as the second to fifth most used languages is probably less noteworthy than the significant margin between English and 'the rest'. English is more than 13 times more likely to be used than French. The result of this item will be further discussed later when these reported language practices are compared to language practices that would be desired by our study's participants.

Beyond the frequency of LOTG usage in work, the study's participants were asked whether they could immediately think of situations in which their multilingual repertoire may be useful in their daily work routine. The data analysis shows that 80.9% of all participants ( $n = 554$ ) answered 'Yes'.

In the follow-up item, participants were given the opportunity to name such situations in an open response format. Based on a rough thematic coding of these open answers, Table 4 provides a summary of the most frequently mentioned scenarios in which staff use LOTG.

What can be seen in Table 4 is that communication with non-German speaking students and guests from abroad are the most frequently named situations in which members of staff use languages other than German. Overall, most entries show that LOTG usage of the participants is concerned with internationalisation activities in the widest sense.

Returning to the statistics mentioned before, the following issues were among the key findings of this explorative analysis. For the purposes of this study, we wanted to identify whether there are multilingual resources within the staff body that are not being used (but could easily be). It can hence already be seen that the difference between 71.9% of staff who said they used LOTG regularly at work and the figure of 80.9% of staff who indicated that they most certainly see situations in their daily work life in which their multilingual competences may be useful is certainly noteworthy. Among other things, these two figures generally also indicate a positive attitude towards using LOTG.



**Figure 3.** Languages at work.

**Table 4.** Situations for LOTG usage.

SITUATION	RESPONSES	%
Communication with guests from abroad	83	23.45
Communication with non-German speaking students	124	35.03
Communication with non-German speaking colleagues	56	15.82
Consulting / Advising	33	9.32
Responding to phone calls and emails	48	13.56
Contact with international partners	65	18.36
Contact with international service agents	23	6.5
Website and info-material design in languages other than German	25	7.06
Presentations	25	7.06
Research	15	4.24
Other	29	8.19

In the search to further clarify this point, there is a final piece of data evidence to be considered. Beyond the questions regarding the actual usage of LOTG at work (71.9% yes) and a question asking for situations in which LOTG may be useful (80.9% yes), participants of the study were also asked whether they would like to use LOTG more often at work. In response to this, 75.1% of the respondents ( $n = 511$ ) said 'Yes'. This further stresses the generally positive attitude towards LOTG usage. Moreover, given the wording of the question ('Would you like to use languages other than German at work (more often)?') and the figure of 75% agreement, it can be argued that there is a certain mismatch when looking at the language practices at the workplace. Analysing the follow-up item that asked for the precise languages the employees would like to use (in contrast to the languages that they *are* using) provides a clearer picture on the aforementioned point.

Table 5 contrasts the languages that were reported as being used on a regular basis at work (left column) to the languages that participants said they would like to use (right column). Recalling the results of the actual language usage, presented in Figure 3, the dominance of English is rather striking. Comparing this to the languages in the right column, several points can be made. First, it can be seen that the popularity of English decreases significantly. On the one hand, this shows that in spite of English being the most used language beyond German, there are still 340 participants who wish to use it even more. On the other hand, there is also a clear tendency away from favouring English towards mentioning other languages. French and Spanish are mentioned approximately three times as often in response to the desired language practice compared to the reported, actual language practice. Similar tendencies can be observed for Russian, Italian and the sixth-most named language, Chinese. Adding in the overall entries of the five most frequently named languages beyond English, it becomes quite clear that English dominates the actual language practices with a ratio of 450:87. This changes in the analysis

**Table 5.** Actual versus desired language practice.

What languages <u>have</u> you used?	What languages <u>would you like</u> to use?
English 450	English 340
French 34	French 89
Spanish 27	Spanish 81
Russian 12	Italian 23
Italian 10	Russian 19
Chinese 4	Chinese 12



of the responses to the desired language practices to a ratio of 340:324. The difference between these two ratios illustrates a certain mismatch regarding the usage of the university staff's multilingual resources.

## 5. Discussion and summary

In summary, the project presented in this paper has shed light on a number of issues related to institutional multilingualism and language practice in the institution. The underlying survey collected data on the distribution of linguistic diversity among university staff in technical and administrative functions. The data presentation has shown that over 60 different languages are part of the respondents' multilingual repertoire. It has been illustrated that English is spoken at a remarkably high level on average and that it is used by a majority of the employees on a regular basis in work. Regarding the usage of languages other than German, the analysis has revealed a number of interesting points. In the daily working routine of our respondents, English is used more than 13 times more often than any other single language. Beyond English, the respondents named French and Spanish as the next two languages to be used for work purposes; two languages that belong to the most popular languages in secondary education curricula. The situations for which LOTG are used can broadly be characterised as (inward and outward) internationalisation activities. The final part of this paper attempted to analyse measures of efficiency and fairness in institutional multilingualism. The only indication that can be found in the data, however, was the mismatch between the actual language practices and the desired language use scenarios. While English was favoured in both lists, it became clear that the participants would wish for other languages to play a bigger role in the institutional language practices.

Based on what has been illustrated in the analytical sections of this paper, it is uncontroversial to say that a considerable amount of resources (in the form of multilingual competences) has been identified amongst the university's administrative and technical staff. Not only has the data analysis shown that LOTG are used frequently by the majority of the participants, but also that there is a relatively positive attitude towards employing their multilingual repertoire. However, what has also already been explained is that the daily usage of LOTG is mainly concerned with English with a margin of being more than 13 times more often used than the second-placed language in this context, French. This ubiquitous role of English may not come as a huge surprise, but it seems certainly noteworthy that when looking at the traditional home languages of the biggest migrant communities, the picture changes completely. With the arguable exception of Russian, which has been named by 12 participants as a language that they use at work, we see that Turkish, Polish and Portuguese play virtually no role at all. Through the lens of human capital theory and the distinction between market value and non-market value (Grin, 2002), it can hence be argued that besides German, economic value of language skills in the workplace nearly exclusively plays a role for English. Taking the relevant theory on language commodification or the role of language in a capitalist society into consideration (Duchêne & Heller, 2012; Heller, 2003), similar points can be made. The data analysis has shown that there is an exclusion of migrant languages and that the languages of higher prestige (mainly English, and to some extent French, Spanish and Italian) are the LOTG that are used. It can therefore be said that while other languages are used in the workplace, the languages

in question are of high status, which exhibits a certain reinforcement of linguistic hegemony (mostly with regard to English).

One question that remains unanswered is what an institution can do or should do with language skills of its employees that remain unused. More and more studies and authors address issues of frustration, morale and (lack of) well-being (Government of Canada, 2016, p. 56; Grin, 2011; Truchot, 2013) when discussing potential frictions between economically valuable languages and personally valuable languages. These frictions occur, for example, in scenarios where an institutional (private or public sector) language policy is forced upon employees (i.e. a German company decides to communicate in English only). In a comprehensive report on languages in the economy by the Government of Canada (2016), the authors observe that ‘some trends in the workplace are moving towards a more multilingual environment [...] rather than enforcing a one-language communications environment’ (Government of Canada, 2016, p. 7). Empirical evidence on this matter, however, appears to be lacking. In its policy recommendations, the aforementioned report suggests that human resources departments should keep track of all languages of their employees (Government of Canada, 2016, p. 81). This might be a worthy first step both to enable a company to make economic use of these skills and to facilitate fair multilingual communication where this is applicable.

As future research avenues in the area of analysing institutional multilingualism, discussions on fairness and efficiency in an economic sense, but also further debates on linguistic justice in a sociolinguistic sense could be greatly beneficial for a better understanding of the matter, and for the design and implementation of ‘good’ institutional language policies. This, however, remains among numerous research desiderata, some of which could also lie in conducting further research on management-level stakeholders’ perceptions regarding the multilingual functioning of the institution, or in identifying ways in which multilingualism among university staff can be valued, supported, fostered and used in a fair manner.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Claudia Thea Schmitt and Hamburg University’s Centre for a Sustainable University for their support in the research project that is presented in this paper. My mentors Ingrid Gogolin and Drorit Lengyel have been exceptionally supportive and without them, neither the fieldwork nor the writing of this paper had been possible. Moreover, I wish to thank Lion König for his valuable feedback on the first draft of this paper in his role as conference discussant, and finally, I cannot thank Nguyen Minh Hoang enough for his help in the formatting and editing process for the revised version of this paper.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## References

- Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung. (Ed.). (2016). *Bildung in Deutschland 2016. Ein indikatorengestützter Bericht mit einer Analyse zu Bildung und Migration* [Education in Germany 2016. An indicator-supported report with an analysis on education and migration]. Bielefeld: W. Bertelsmann Verlag.

- Barnes, P. (2006). *Capitalism 3.0: A guide to reclaiming the commons. A BK currents book* (1st ed.). San Francisco, Berkeley: Berrett-Koehler.
- Berthold, C., & Leichsenring, H. (2012). CHE diversity report: Studierende mit Migrationshintergrund. Retrieved from [https://www.che.de/downloads/CHE\\_Diversity\\_Report\\_B1.pdf](https://www.che.de/downloads/CHE_Diversity_Report_B1.pdf)
- Chiswick, B. R., & Miller, P. W. (1995). The endogeneity between language and earnings: International analyses. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 13, 246–288.
- Chiswick, B. R., & Miller, P. W. (2007). *The economics of language: International analyses* (Vol. 65). London: Routledge.
- Coulmas, F. (2008). English monolingualism in scientific communication and progress in science, good or bad? *AILA Review*, 20(1), 5–13.
- Council of Europe. (2001). Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Retrieved from [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework\\_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf)
- Del Percio, A. (2018). Engineering commodifiable workers: Language, migration and the governmentality of the self. *Language Policy*, 17(2), 239–259.
- Del Percio, A., & van Hoof, S. (2017). Enterprising migrants: Language and the shifting politics of activation. In M.-C. Flubacher, & A. del Percio (Eds.), *Language, education and social change: A critical view on neoliberalism* (pp. 140–162). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Duchêne, A., & Heller, M. (Eds.). (2012). *Routledge critical studies in multilingualism: Vol. 1. Language in late capitalism: Pride and profit*. New York: Routledge.
- Dustmann, C. (1994). Speaking fluency, writing fluency and earnings of migrants. *Journal of Population Economics*, 7(2), 133–156.
- Eide, E. R., & Showalter, M. H. (2010). Human capital. In D. J. Brewer, & P. J. McEwan (Eds.), *Economics of education* (pp. 27–32). Oxford and San Diego: Elsevier.
- Flubacher, M.-C., Duchêne, A., & Coray, R. (2018). *Language investment and employability: The uneven distribution of resources in the public employment service*. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Gazzola, M. (2016). Research for cult committee - European strategy for multilingualism: Benefits and costs. Retrieved from [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/573460/IPOL\\_STU\(2016\)573460\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/573460/IPOL_STU(2016)573460_EN.pdf)
- Gogolin, I. (1994). *Der monolinguale Habitus der multilingualen Schule. Internationale Hochschulschriften*. Münster: Waxmann.
- Government of Canada. (2016). Economic advantages of bilingualism. Literature review. Retrieved from <https://www.caslt.org/files/learn-languages/pch-bilingualism-lit-review-final-en.pdf>
- Grin, F. (1994). The economics of language: Match or mismatch? *International Political Science Review*, 15(1), 25–42.
- Grin, F. (1997). Diversité linguistique et théorie économique de la valeur. In J. Hatem (Ed.), *Lieux de l'Intersubjectivité* (pp. 155–174). Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Grin, F. (2002). *Using language economics and education economics in language education policy*. Straßburg. Retrieved from Direction Générale IV website: <https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/GrinEN.pdf>
- Grin, F. (2003). Language planning and economics. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 4(1), 1–66.
- Grin, F. (2006). Economic considerations in language policy. In T. Ricento (Ed.), *Language and social change. An introduction to language policy: Theory and method* (pp. 77–94). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publ.
- Grin, F. (2011). Les langues dans le monde du travail - quelle(s) recherche(s) nous faut-il? *Babylonia*, 2011(03), 43–47.
- Grin, F. (2015). Managing languages in academia: Pointers from education economics and language economics. In C. Robustelli, & G. Stickel (Eds.), *Duisburg papers on research in language and culture: Band/Volume 109. Language use in university: Teaching and research; contributions to the Annual Conference 2014 of EFNIL in Florence*. Frankfurt am Main and New York: Peter Lang.
- Grin, F., & Gazzola, M. (2013). Assessing efficiency and fairness in multilingual communication: Theory and application through indicators. In A.-C. Berthoud, F. Grin, & G. Lüdi (Eds.), *Multilingualism and diversity management. Exploring the dynamics of multilingualism: The DYLAN project* (pp. 365–386). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

- Heller, M. (2003). Globalization, the new economy, and the commodification of language and identity. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 7(4), 473–492.
- Klinger, T., Duarte, J., Gogolin, I., Schnoor, B., & Trebbels, M. (2017). *Sprachentwicklung Im Kontext Von Mehrsprachigkeit: Hypothesen, Methoden, Forschungsperspektiven*. Wiesbaden: Springer, Vs Verlag Fur Sozialwissenschaften.
- Lengyel, D. (2017). Stichwort: Mehrsprachigkeitsforschung. *Zeitschrift Für Erziehungswissenschaft*, 20(2), 153–174.
- Little, D. (2006). The common European framework of reference for languages: Content, purpose, origin, reception and impact. *Language Teaching*, 39(3), 167–190.
- Marriott, H. (2013). Multilingualism among university staff: A case study of language management at an Australian university. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 10(4), 454–468.
- Piller, I. (2016). *Linguistic diversity and social justice: An introduction to applied sociolinguistics* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Schroedler, T. (2018). *The value of foreign language learning: A study on linguistic capital and the economic value of language skills*. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden.
- Statistisches Amt für Hamburg und Schleswig-Holstein. (2014). Ergebnisbericht: Beschäftigtenbefragung zur Erhebung eines Migrationshintergrundes der Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeiter der hamburgischen Verwaltung 2014 [Report. Employee Survey on Migration Background of Staff in Hamburg Public Administration]. Retrieved from <http://www.hamburg.de/contentblob/4325362/ef26b32071fcd7e1ebe12a19c50a668a/data/do-bericht-statistikamt.pdf>
- Statistisches Amt für Hamburg und Schleswig-Holstein. (2016). Bevölkerung mit Migrationshintergrund in den Hamburger Stadtteilen Ende 2015 [Population with Migration Background in Hamburg's Districts 2015]. Retrieved from [https://www.statistik-nord.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/Statistik\\_informiert\\_SPEZIAL/SI\\_SPEZIAL\\_I\\_2016\\_komplett.pdf](https://www.statistik-nord.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/Statistik_informiert_SPEZIAL/SI_SPEZIAL_I_2016_komplett.pdf)
- Tabiola, H., & Lorente, B. (2017). Neoliberalism in ELT aid: Interrogating a USAID ELT project in southern Philippines. In M.-C. Flubacher, & A. del Percio (Eds.), *Language, education and social change: A critical view on neoliberalism* (pp. 122–139). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Truchot, C. (2013). Internationalisation et choix linguistiques dans les entreprises françaises: entre «tout anglais» et pratiques plurilingues. *Synergies Italie*, 2013(9), 75–90.
- Vaillancourt, F. (1980). *Differences in earnings by language groups in Quebec, 1970: An economic analysis*. Publication / Centre International de Recherche sur le Bilinguisme B: Vol. 90. Québec: Centre Internat. I de Recherche sur le Bilinguisme.