Why should demolinguistic projections inform language policy choices?

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In large parts of European academic and public discourse, it is apparently taken for granted that one lingua franca must dominate and that it will be English, apart from the problematic features of any form of linguistic hegemony (no matter which language dominates), the changing geopolitical power constellations do not necessarily favour this scenario – including the further expansion of global English. The hegemonic position of the English language proceeds from the expanding influence of English-speaking countries in the twentieth century (Phillipson, 2009). In the 21st century, however, this political and economic dominance is expected to decrease, and it is not obvious that the role of English will remain unchanged.

What does research tell us?

The twentieth century has favoured the political and commercial expansion of English-speaking countries. Commentators have argued that the position of English will be challenged due to the fact that the global domination of the US economic and concentration of competing languages also matters, as does their prestige and status. The complex interplay of political, economic and demographic factors that shape language dynamics suggests that a wide range of languages should be taken into account in a forward-looking language policy for Europe. EU member states could make more space for the languages referred to above in school curricula, taking care in particular not to narrow down their language education policy to the teaching of a mother tongue plus English only. This more open orientation ties in with the recommendation made in COM (2008 / 566-7) that the teaching of languages of wider communication is relevant to boost competitiveness and to improve opportunities in global business spheres.

References and further reading