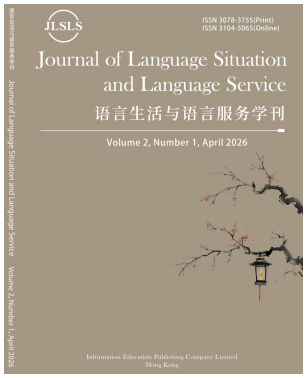

JLSLS

HIEP Academic Publishing

Journal of Language Situation and Language Service

***JLSLS*, Vol. 1, No.1, 2026, pp.1-17**

Print ISSN: 3078-3755; Online ISSN: 3104-5065

Journal homepage: https://www.lslsjournal.com

DOI：https://doi.org/10.64058/jlsls260101uevlb

Unlocking the Economic Value of Language to Boost High-Quality Economic Development

——An Interview with Professor Li Yuming[1] of Beijing Language and Culture University

Wang Hailan, Zhang Xuetong

Abstract: This paper presents an interview with Professor Li Yuming of Beijing Language and Culture University, focusing on the economic value of language and its role in the contemporary era. As argued by Professor Li, language is not only a cultural "soft power" but also a "hard power" with significant economic attributes. The language industry encompasses diverse sectors such as language training, translation and interpretation, information processing, language arts, and language rehabilitation. Characterized by green industry （or eco-friendly

[1] Li Yuming: Winner of the National May Day Labor Medal (1997), Professor at Beijing Language and Culture University, expert receiving special allowance from the State Council, Distinguished Professor of Beijing. He currently serves as a Consultant of the National Language Commission and President of the Chinese Lexicography Society. He has previously served as Deputy Director of the National Language Commission, Director of the Department of Language Information Management of the Ministry of Education, and Party Secretary of Beijing Language and Culture University. His main research areas include grammar, child language acquisition, and language planning. He has published over 40 academic works, including *The Development of Child Language*, *Studies on the Category of Quantity in Chinese*, *Essays on China's Language Planning*, and *The Early Years of Life*, and has served as Editor-in-Chief of *The Great Dictionary of Global Chinese*. He has also published more than 700 journal articles. His academic achievements have received multiple awards for outstanding research achievements in humanities and social sciences from Chinese universities. He has long been dedicated to national language planning and practice, leading major national research projects such as the development of the *General Mandarin Character Table* and the National Social Science Fund major project "Research on Issues of Language Standardization in the New Era." He has made outstanding contributions to the field of language policy research.

Received: 17 Apr 2026 / Revised: 04 May 2026 / Accepted: 16 May 2026 / Published online: 30 May 2026 / Print published: 30 Jun 2026.

production ）and high added value, it makes a remarkable contribution to employment and economic growth. In the digital economy era, language data, as a key factor of production, serve as a core resource for artificial intelligence training and the development of language models. Furthermore, language proficiency is closely linked to poverty reduction. The promotion of Putonghua helps enhance human capital, facilitate information flow, and eventually contribute to economic development. In regional coordinated development, language planning should provide foundational support for economic layout, emergency preparedness and response, and cultural shaping. Looking ahead, efforts should be made to strengthen the discipline development of language economics, promote the integration of linguistics and the other disciplines, cultivate versatile interdisciplinary talents, and promote the development of the language industry and language-related professions, so as to fully leverage the strategic role of language in the digital economy.

Keywords: Li Yuming; Language Economy; Language industry; Language Data; Language-based Poverty Alleviation; Regional Language Planning

Author Biographies: Wang Hailan, Corresponding author, Associate Professor at the School of Humanities, Guangzhou University; Research Fellow at the National Center for Language Services and Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Language Research, China National Language and Script Research Institution. Research interests: language service, language economy, and language communication. E-mail: hlwang0916@126.com. **Zhang Xuetong**, Grade-Level Deputy Director, No.32 Middle School of Handan. Research interest: language service. E-mail: zhangori@126.com.

标题：释放语言经济价值 服务经济高质量发展——访北京语言大学李宇明教授

摘要：本文围绕语言的经济价值与时代角色，对北京语言大学李宇明教授进行专访。语言不仅是文化“软实力”，更是具有显著经济属性的“硬实力”。语言产业涵盖培训、翻译、信息处理、艺术、康复等多元业态，具有绿色、高附加值的特点，对就业与经济增长贡献显著。在数字经济时代，语言数据作为关键生产要素，是人工智能训练与语言模型开发的核心资源。此外，语言能力与减贫密切相关，推广普通话有助于增强人力资本、促进信息流通与经济发展。在区域协同发展中，语言规划应作为基础支撑，服务于经济布局、应急保障与文化塑造。面对未来，应加强语言经济学学科建设，推动语言学与多学科交叉融合，培养复合型人才，关注语言产业和语言职业的发展，充分发挥语言在数字经济中的战略作用。

关键词：李宇明；语言经济；语言产业；语言数据；语言扶贫；区域语言规划

作者简介：王海兰，通讯作者，广州大学人文学院副教授，国家语言文字科研机构国家语言服务与粤港澳大湾区语言研究中心研究员，研究方向：语言服务、语言经济和语言传播。电邮：hlwang0916@126.com。**张雪彤**，邯郸市第三十二中学年级副主任，研究方向：语言服务。电邮：zhangori@126.com。

Today, we are greatly honored to interview Professor Li Yuming on the topic "Unlocking the Economic Value of Language to Serve High-Quality Economic Development." He is a Professor at Beijing Language and Culture University and Director of the Research Center for Chinese Language and Character Norms and Standards. Professor Li has long been dedicated to research in the fields of language economics, language planning, and language resources. He is among the first to propose cutting-edge academic perspectives, including "language as a form of hard power" and "language data as a key factor of production in the information age." These perspectives have opened new horizons for understanding the role and function of language in economic development. Against the backdrop of the current booming digital economy, language is not only a tool for communication and cognition but also a crucial resource that drives industrial upgrading, empowers regional development, and fosters technological innovation. In this interview, Professor Li systematically elaborates, from theory to practice and industry to policy, on the economic attributes of language, its contributions to various business formats, the value of language data, and its practical significance in poverty alleviation and regional development. The discussion provides profound insights into how language is deeply integrated into the economic cycle and supports high-quality development.

1. The Economic Attributes of Language and Their Theoretical Foundations

[Wang Hailan, Zhang Xuetong] (hereinafter referred to as "Prof. Wang and Zhang"):

Thank you, Professor Li, for taking time out of your busy schedule for this interview. As one of the earliest scholars in China to advocate for the recognition of the economic attributes of language, you have put forward important propositions such as "language is also a hard power." Could you please elaborate on how your understanding of language evolved from viewing it as "soft power" to recognizing it as "hard power"? And in what ways do the economic attributes of language manifest themselves?

[Prof. Li Yuming] (hereinafter referred to as "Prof. Li"):

Language has long been understood primarily as a medium of cultural communication, value identification, and civilizational continuity – in a word, as a form of "soft power." This view is certainly not incorrect, but it is incomplete. Language and the economy are intimately connected, yet traditional awareness has not fully grasped language's economic dimension. Driven by the dual forces of population mobility and informatization, the economic contribution of language has grown so pronounced that it can no longer be overlooked. In Switzerland, language contributes as much as 10% to the national economy. It is precisely this increasingly visible economic importance that has prompted the national language authority and the academic community to begin exploring the economic value of language. The "National Language Commission's 12th Five-Year Research Plan 2011 Annual Project Guideline," for instance, for the first time

listed "Research on Language Economy and Language industry Development Strategy" as a key research priority. In 2011 and 2012, I published articles such as "Language is Also 'Hard Power'" and "Recognizing the Economic Attributes of Language" to elaborate these points. Over the past two decades, research on the language economy and language industry in China has advanced rapidly, shedding light on the economic functions of language in the following four aspects.

First, language proficiency is a vital component of the labor force. In the era of informatization and globalization, particularly in service industries and other non-manual labor sectors, the share of language proficiency in overall labor capacity has increased steadily. Competence in one's native language, command of foreign languages, and the ability to process linguistic information by computer have all become key variables in employment competitiveness and career development. Research in language economics demonstrates that language proficiency often determines job opportunities and income levels.

Second, language participates in and coordinates economic activities. It plays a major role in the dissemination of technological and economic information, in the flow of factors of production, and in the formation of a unified market. As the most important carrier of information, language is the medium through which human economic activities are organized. The "Fishman-Pool hypothesis" points to an inverse correlation between linguistic diversity and economic development, while linguistic unity is positively correlated with economic development. Language fragmentation increases communication costs and hinders the flow of information, technology, and production factors. In contrast, linguistic unity and effective coordination help reduce transaction costs, facilitate the formation of a unified market, and promote regional economic development. Language not only serves the economy but also, in a certain sense, affects the efficiency of economic operation and helps shape the order within which economic activities take place.

Third, the language industry constitutes an important part of the national economy. It encompasses a variety of business formats and nurtures a wide range of language-related professions, producing both tangible and intangible language products to meet societal needs. Language-related professions and the language industry are primarily based on language (and script), language knowledge, language technology, and language art as the means of labor or objects of production. The language industry is green and knowledge-intensive– it is environmental friendly, low in energy consumption, and high in added value. It makes modest demands on natural resources and is deeply integrated with the cultural industry and digital technology. With immense development prospects and significant economic benefits, it can provide substantial employment opportunities and therefore warrants substantial attention.

Fourth, language data is a key factor of production in the digital economy, empowering new quality productive forces and the development of future industries. The digital economy endows language with the nature of a productive force. In October 2019, the Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of

the Communist Party of China proposed to "improve the mechanism whereby production factors such as labor, capital, land, knowledge, technology, management, and data are evaluated by the market and compensated according to their contribution." Thereby, language data is incorporated into the category of production factors alongside labor, capital, land, knowledge, technology, and management. Language data is the most abundantly created and most frequently used type of data by humans, and it is also the most heavily utilized and produced by large language models. Language data has become a key factor of production in the digital economy – indeed, this is the most important and far-reaching economic attribute of language in the digital age.[1]

2. Business Segments and Economic Contributions of the Language Industry

[Prof. Wang/Zhang]: You have categorized the language industry into multiple sectors, such as language training, language translation, language information processing, speech–language rehabilitation, language creativity, and language arts. Could you describe how these formats are currently developing in China? What are their main contributions to the national economy? Are there any statistics on the economic contribution of the language industry?

[Prof. Li]: The language industry primarily consists of sectors that produce and provide language-based products. The book *Introduction to the Language industry* by He Hongzhi and Chen Peng is the earliest work on the language industry in China. In this book, the language industry is divided into nine sectors: (1) language training, (2) language publishing, (3) language translation, (4) language information processing, (5) language arts, (6) speech–language rehabilitation, (7) language exhibitions and conferences, (8) language creativity, and (9) language proficiency assessment. This classification, which draws on European and American research on the language industry while incorporating practical experience from China, essentially captures the overall landscape of China's language industry.

At present, these sectors are no longer operating in isolation. Instead, they are shifting from fragmentation to consolidation, from traditional forms to digital forms, and from ancillary services to independent industries. Sectors such as language training, language translation, and language proficiency assessment started relatively early, have sustained strong market demand, and have developed into relatively mature service systems. Sectors such as language publishing, language arts, and language creativity are closely linked to the cultural industry and continue to generate value in content production, brand communication, and aesthetic consumption. The language information processing sector is developing the fastest—development in input methods, font libraries, speech recognition, machine translation, intelligent customer service, and human-computer dialogue now constitute the most technology-intensive and economically prominent part of the language industry. Fields such as speech–language rehabilitation and language exhibitions and conferences have considerable social demand but still offer plenty of room for

[1] A detailed exposition of the views concerning the 'economic attributes of language' can be found in the articles by LI Yuming "On Individual Language Ability and National Language Capacity" (*Applied Linguistics*, 2021No.03) "Reflections on the Relationship Between Language and Economy (*Language Industry Research*,2018)" "Understanding the Economic Attributes of Language (*Applied Linguistics*, 2012 No.03)" "On the Construction of Foreign Language Education Capacity (*Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 2025No.03)" and others.

expansion.

Today, the development of the language industry has entered the "data era". With data being recognized as a factor of production, the importance of language data has rapidly come to the forefront. Both in terms of quantity and quality, language data stands out as one of the most critical types of data. Emerging sectors such as machine translation, intelligent writing, voice interaction, corpus annotation, knowledge base construction, multimodal database development, data filtering, and data trading are all based on language data and can essentially be seen as new growth points where the language industry extends into the digital economy. The language data industry and the language intelligence industry, as emerging forms of the language industry, are accelerating their development. Traditional language industry sectors are also either transforming into these two industries or deeply integrating with them. At present, these sectors have already reached a considerable scale in China.

Regarding the economic contribution of language, research by the Swiss economist F. Grin indicates that language generates annual revenues of 50 billion Swiss francs, accounting for approximately 10% of Switzerland's GDP. This is a highly compelling figure. In China, however, the contribution of language to the economy remains unknown—no one has yet calculated it. The economic contribution of language can be either direct or indirect. Direct economic contribution of language may be relatively small and not immediately apparent, as language is characterized by its diffusiveness—its economic benefits permeate a wide range of industries and sectors. In China's national GDP statistics, the contribution of language has not been separately accounted for. Nevertheless, it is indeed necessary to establish a unified statistical framework to quantify language's economic contribution.

In recent years, the China Language Industry Research Institute has been conducting surveys on the language industry by sector and region, and has obtained some useful data. Preliminary research by the Institute suggests that China's language industry accounts for about 1% of the national economy. In 2019, the total output value of the language industry across all sectors exceeded one trillion yuan. In 2020, the output value of Beijing's language industry reached 200 billion yuan, contributing 5.55% to the region's GDP — a highly significant share.[1]

3. The Contemporary Significance of Language Data as a Factor of Production

[Prof. Wang/Zhang]: In recent years, you have repeatedly pointed out that "language data is a key factor of production in the information age" and have regarded the study of language data as an important new mission for linguistics in the age of digital intelligence. Could you please elaborate on how we should understand the connotation of language data? What are the core issues that current research on language data should focus on? And how can we fully realize the value of language data as a factor of production?

[Prof. Li]: Incorporating data into the category of production factors represents a major development of Marx's theory of productive forces, and serves as a new manifestation of the idea that "science and

[1] For a detailed elaboration of the views on the 'language industry' can be found in the articles by LI Yuming, "Data Age and Language industry (*Journal of Shandong Normal University* (Social Sciences), 2020 No.05)" "Language Services and the Language industry (*East Journal of Translatio*n, 2016 No.04)" "Some problems in the study of language industry (*Journal of Jiangsu Normal University* (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition),2019 No.02)" "The Language Rehabilitation Industry in China: Current Development and Strategic Outlook (*Chinese Journal of Language Policy and Planning*, 2026 No.01)".

technology are the primary productive forces" in the digital economy era. Data is a key factor of production in the digital age, and language data, as the most important type of data, should likewise be treated as a factor of production. This status as a production factor is the most fundamental attribute of language in the digital era.

Language data refers to all types of data constructed on the basis of linguistic symbol systems. In terms of its forms of manifestation, it can be further divided into several categories, including linguistic discipline data, discourse data, language-derived data, artificial language data, and language code data. From the perspective of supporting the development of artificial intelligence, there are both general-purpose language data that support the development of large language models and specialized language data tailored to specific industries, populations, or domains to boost the development of specialized large language models. Language data plays a crucial role in areas such as language preservation, language teaching, linguistic research, language product development, language information processing, and, in particular, in driving the advancement of artificial intelligence and digital technology innovation.

Research on the progression from "data" to "language data" and further to the productive factor attributes of "language data" is still in its early stages, but some promising studies and policy initiatives have already emerged. For example, *Chinese Journal of Language Policy and Planning* published a special issue on "Language Data and the Digital Economy" in its 4th issue of 2022. In 2024, the *Journal of Tianjin Normal University (Social Science Edition)* published a symposium titled "The Connotation, Modalities, and Development Pathways of New Language Productive Forces." In January 2025, the Ministry of Education, the State Language Commission, and the Cyberspace Administration of China jointly issued the *Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of Digital Chinese and Advancing the Informationization of Language and Script*, which proposes five action initiatives: using Digital Chinese to serve educational development, to boost scientific and technological innovation, to empower cultural heritage, to drive industrial upgrading, and to promote social progress. This represents an important institutional arrangement for unlocking the value of Digital Chinese as a factor of production.

To fully leverage the role of language data as a factor of production, a "two-way endeavor" is required. On the one hand, linguistics must keep pace with the times and study language data issues in the digital economy era, such as the construction of language databases, language data trading, the composition and operational mechanisms of the language data industry chain, the cultivation of language data professionals, and related regulatory and ethical issues. On the other hand, other academic fields and social organizations also need to develop "language awareness"—recognizing the important academic value of linguistics in the digital economy era, proactively drawing scientific insights from linguistics, and providing necessary support to linguistics in terms of discipline development and talent cultivation.

The Chinese government attaches great importance to data infrastructure and emphasizes the need to activate the potential of data as a production factor. In the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026–2030) for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China (hereinafter referred to as the 15th Five-Year Plan), released in March of this year, the term "data" appears 59 times. The plan calls for enhancing the efficient supply of computing power, algorithms, and data; deepening the development and

utilization of data resources; building high-quality datasets for various fields; and carrying out the "Data Element X" initiative. As the most important type of data, language data constitutes a vital component of data in other critical domains. Research on language data can thus play a foundational role in advancing national data infrastructure.[1]

4. Language-based Poverty Alleviation and Language-Assisted Rural Revitalization

[Prof. Wang/Zhang]: You have previously pointed out that "language and poverty are correlated, and language can help alleviate poverty," referring to the promotion of Putonghua as a "linguistic pathway" to poverty alleviation. Theoretically, how can language ability be transformed into a force for poverty reduction and societal development? What representative experiences has China gained in the research and practice of language-based poverty alleviation? And now that nationwide poverty has been essentially eradicated, how can the achievements of language-based poverty alleviation be effectively linked to rural revitalization, so that the "power of language" continues to be converted into an endogenous driver of rural development?

[Prof. Li]: Language-based poverty alleviation is a foundational measure for reducing and eradicating poverty. The main reason that language can help alleviate poverty lies in its close relationships with education, information, and internet access, and with people's capabilities and opportunities.

First, language ability is an important form of human capital. By "language ability" I mean not only proficiency in spoken language but also literacy, the ability to use written language including the ability to command a standard national language which has a high knowledge content and economic value, as well as the ability to employ necessary language technologies. Research in the economics of language has shown that language ability often determines employment opportunities and income levels. For impoverished populations, mastering Putonghua and improving language ability effectively enhances their employability, expands their scope of activities, and increases their opportunities for development.

Second, language ability is a key condition for accessing educational resources, and it helps break the intergenerational transmission of poverty. In China, Putonghua is an important medium of instruction in formal education. If children acquire a good command of the standard national language before school age, they can more easily enter the modern education system and acquire the capacity for sustained development. Educational resources, mediated through learners' language ability, are transformed into resources both for personal and regional development. This is of great significance for breaking the chains of poverty and preventing its transmission across generations.

Third, language is an important channel for communicating information, transmitting knowledge, and connecting with modern society. The basic function of language is to exchange information and transfer knowledge. Mastering a widely used language opens up a high-speed channel for information exchange,

---

[1] Detailed discussions regarding language data as a production factor are available in Li Yuming's papers:"On the Function as a Production Factor and Property Rights Systems Construction of Language Data (*Language Teaching and Linguistic Studies*, 2024 No.02)""Language Data is the Key Data in the Era of Big Data (*Chinese Journal of Language Policy and Planning*, 2025 No.06)""Introduction: From Data to Language Data (*Chinese Journal of Language Policy and Planning,* 2022 No.04)".

which facilitates the inflow of production factors including capital, talent, and technology, and enables the dissemination of economic and trade information, thereby promoting local economic development. Recognizing the poverty-alleviating function of language allows us to build a linguistic pathway out of poverty for impoverished populations and regions, contributing the "power of language" to overcoming economic and developmental disadvantages and advancing local social progress and civilization.

Poverty is a major social challenge that humanity—and certainly China—has been addressing over the long term. On China's journey toward poverty alleviation and eradication, the academic community has actively participated, harnessing the benefits of language for poverty reduction. This has included developing targeted multimedia Putonghua textbooks for impoverished areas, building multiple online learning platforms, designing appropriate Putonghua testing standards and software, and mobilizing large numbers of volunteers to carry out language-based poverty alleviation work in impoverished regions. At the same time, a series of academic studies have been conducted, examining the principles of language-based poverty alleviation from perspectives such as language ability and human capital, language education and interruption of intergenerational poverty, language and technology dissemination, and language and the flow of production factors. These efforts have helped to summarize experiences and provide guidance for carrying out language-based poverty alleviation in a targeted manner. "Language-based poverty alleviation" marks a significant chapter in the history of the People's Republic of China, and even more so a masterstroke in the history of Chinese linguistics.

On the basis of consolidating the achievements of poverty alleviation, China has now embarked on the major endeavor of rural revitalization. Linking the accomplishments of language-based poverty alleviation with rural revitalization has thus become a new topic in the study of language life (Yuyan Shenghuo)—one that explores the collection, preservation, development, and utilization of rural language resources, and devises language planning for rural areas in the context of revitalization.[1]

5. Regional Language Planning and Coordinated Development of Regional Economies

[Prof. Wang/Zhang]: In recent years, you have repeatedly emphasized the importance of regional language research and proposed academic concepts such as "regional language planning" and "regional linguistics". Could you please explain how language can support regional development in the context of coordinated regional development and opening-up layouts, such as the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, and free trade zones (ports)?

[Prof. Li]: The development of cross-administrative regions such as the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, the Yangtze River Economic Belt, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, and various free trade zones (ports) has given rise to new dynamics and new layouts for China's economic development, and has also raised new demands for the advancement of regional language research.

---

[1] Detailed discussions on language-assisted poverty alleviation can be found in Li Yuming's works: "Building the Language Highway for Poverty Alleviation and Eradication (*Yuyan Wenzi Zhoubao*,2018-08-01)""The Theory and Practice of Language Poverty Alleviation (*Zhongguo Xiuci* 2018)""The Relationship between Poverty Relief, Willpower, and Language Proficiency (*CPPCC Daily*, 2020-09-07)".

Formulating regional language plans involves two main tasks. The first task is to properly manage regional language relations. In a given region, multiple languages and language varieties coexist, cooperating with and influencing each other, while sometimes also giving rise to contradictions or conflicts. It is necessary to protect language resources, manage language relations, resolve language conflicts, and leverage the role of language effectively. Managing regional language relations requires establishing two major perspectives on language.

(1) The perspective of language as resource. Every language and every dialect is a non-renewable resource—a linguistic resource, a cultural resource, and even a resource for economic development. All deserve respect and scientific protection, as well as rational development and utilization. The languages and dialects of a region are public goods bestowed by history; they constitute elements of the region's language capacity. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen regional language surveys and regional language protection.

(2) The perspective of harmonious language life. Constructing a harmonious language life is a modern concept. Harmonious language life is not only a marker of community harmony and social harmony, but also an important force in promoting such harmony. The foundation of harmonious language life lies in properly managing language relations. Against the background of national language planning and the international language landscape, the goal is to enable languages and language varieties within a region to coexist amicably, each occupying its proper niche, each leveraging its comparative advantages and achieving synergy. The positive aim is to form a synergy of languages that jointly supports regional development. From a more defensive perspective, it can also mitigate language tensions and avert language conflicts.

The second task is to use language to boost regional development. No region can develop without language. While it cannot be said that all regions are formed on the basis of language, it can be said that most regions have a language story—or will have one. The development of any region depends on the support of language, which helps shape a shared way of life, shared cognition, and shared values. How language supports regional development remains a new academic topic and practical challenge, making it difficult to present a comprehensive picture all at once. Nevertheless, at least the following three aspects are worth considering.

(1) Language communication issues. Regional language communication concerns spoken and written language, as well as various media and linguistic landscapes. From the perspective of communication types, it mainly encompasses four aspects: internal communication, public communication, domain-specific communication, and external communication. The primary principle of regional language

communication is to ensure the instrumental function of unimpeded information flow. However, equal attention should be paid to its symbolic value—the "identity awareness" and "national consciousness" in language use—so that language use aligns with the context and the user's identity, thereby achieving effective outcomes.

(2) Language service issues. The objectives of language services are: to meet the language needs of regional work and production and contribute the benefits of language to regional development; to meet the language needs of regional life and leisure and contribute the benefits of language to a harmonious and better life for regional residents; to meet the language needs of special populations in the region and harness language resources to build an information-accessible society; and to meet the language needs of regional emergency response, leveraging the unique function of language for regional safety and crisis management. Language services require strong language capacity, diverse language talents, and a wide range of language products. Talents need long-term cultivation and aggregation, while products require continuous research, development and renewal.

(3) Language industry issues. For the development of any region, especially regional economic development, it is essential to consider the language industry and recognize the position and role of the language economy within the broader industrial economy. This involves not only acknowleding the role of language education products and language art products in social and cultural life, and the role of language service products for special populations and of emergency language service products to social equity and emergency response, but also—and more importantly—recognizing the role of language information products and language intelligence products in driving economic development and advancing social progress. The future era will be one in which human society prioritizes equipping special domains, specialized industries, and special populations with artificial intelligence assistants (AI assistants). These AI assistants need to communicate with humans through language and therefore must possess linguistic intelligence for human interaction, especially the "native language intelligence" to interact with the people they assist. Linguistics should play a major role in research and the development of AI assistants and native-language robots. This is an issue of great scientific and social significance, and it will become a leading force in the intelligent economy. Therefore, it must also be taken into account in regional language economic planning.

Coordinated regional development is an inherent requirement of Chinese-style modernization. China's 15th Five-Year Plan proposes optimizing the regional economic layout, promoting coordinated regional development, and leveraging the synergistic effects of the regional coordinated development strategy, major regional strategies, the major functional zone strategy, and the new urbanization strategy. It calls for the integrated advancement of intra-regional strategic implementation and inter-regional coordinated development. This demands not only strengthening urban and regional language planning, but also

enhancing coordination among regional language plans, so as to contribute the power of language to coordinated regional development.[1]

6. The Social Significance of Language Consumption and Language Welfare

[Prof. Wang/Zhang]: You have introduced two important concepts: "language consumption" and "language welfare". What is the relationship between these two concepts and language services? Do you think contemporary Chinese society has an adequate awareness of language consumption? What research could be undertaken from the perspective of language welfare?

[Prof. Li]: Language services refer to the use of language (including script), linguistic knowledge, language arts, language technologies, language standards, language data, language products, and all other language derivatives to meet the needs of governments, society, families, and individuals. The recipients of language services are "language consumers." It is because language consumers have various language needs that they seek language services to satisfy those needs.

In my article "Language Services and Language Consumption," I argued that the introduction of the concept of language consumption endows language services with the nature of products. Free language services are non-market goods; free language services supplied by the government can be regarded as "language welfare", while free language services offered by society constitute language-related public welfare undertakings. Paid language services are commodities, and the relationship between service providers and consumers is a commercial one. Language trade forms the language service market, gives rise to various language industries, and naturally generates language dividends.

At present, language consumption awareness in China is moving away from an unconscious stage, and there is a need to awaken, encourage, and guide such awareness in people. In the current context of rapid digitalization, language has transcended its traditional role as a communication tool and has become a core capital for shaping identity, participating in the public domain, and accessing development opportunities. Language should not be simply regarded as an "innate gift" or a "free resource", but rather as a form of "human capital" that can be enhanced through investment. The comprehensive digitalization of lifestyles has given rise to new language needs—such as the precise creation of short video scripts, foreign-language livestreaming sales in cross-border e-commerce, and the creation of atmosphere and identity in online virtual communities. It is therefore necessary to awaken language consumption awareness and guide society to recognize and accept the value-exchange attribute of language.

---

[1] Detailed studies on language and coordinated regional development are available in Li Yuming's papers: "Regional Language Planning and Regional Development (*Journal of Guangzhou University*(Social Science Edition), 2023 No.05)""A Brief Discussion on Language Planning Studies(*Lexicographical Studies*, 2022 No.01)""A Dialogue on Language Life and Language Services in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (*Journal of Guangzhou University* (Social Science Edition), 2023 No.01)""A Preliminary Analysis of Language industry and Service at Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (*Language Industry Research*, 2019)""On Urban Language Planning (*Journal of Tongji University* (Social Science Edition), 2021 No.01)".

The level of language consumption is an important indicator of the quality of language life and reflects the degree of social modernization. Studying language consumption in society and promoting it is therefore of great significance. The vigorous development of language consumption is an inevitable trend in the explicit realization of language value in the digital economy era. At the economic level, language consumption is gradually shifting from the periphery to the center, giving rise to a vast industrial chain that integrates education, technology, and culture, and becoming the foundation of "soft infrastructure." Language consumption not only directly drives economic development but also, by empowering international trade ("Made in China" and "Intelligent Manufacturing in China") and the digital transformation of traditional industries, participates in the development of emerging industries and future industries, deeply engaging in the construction of a new industrial landscape. At the socio-cultural level, the diversified choices of language consumption offer more possibilities for personal skill enhancement and the satisfaction of spiritual needs. Expanding the scale of language consumption helps narrow the "language ability gap," compensates for the shortcomings of public language welfare through market-oriented services, and opens up market-based survival pathways for the preservation of cultural heritage such as dialects and minority languages. For example, cultural and creative products based on the Dongba script of the Naxi ethnic group have reached the general public through e-commerce platforms, enhancing societ's overall cultural inclusiveness and innovative vitality. From a national strategic perspective, a strong language consumption market supports independent innovation in language technologies. Efforts should be made to steer language consumption toward a more inclusive, balanced, and sustainable trajectory.

As for language welfare, I have pointed out in relevant articles that language consumption is largely realized through purchase under market economy conditions. Due to differences in purchasing power and other factors, the state or society provides language products free of charge to specific populations, thereby constituting language welfare. This language welfare permeates various aspects of society. For example, in promoting educational equity, the national common language and script are taught free of charge in minority and rural areas. In public information services, many government websites and public service hotlines offer multilingual and accessible services. In safeguarding basic rights, courts provide free translation services, and hospitals offer language assistance for dialect speakers and foreign patients. In building an accessible society, the application of speech technology and sign language interpretation in television programs is an example. These everyday forms of language welfare can significantly reduce language barriers, enhance society's overall language capacity, and promote social equity and harmonious development. Stimulating language consumption and providing language welfare have significant economic and social value.

From the perspective of language welfare, the following issues require research:

(1) What language welfare provisions currently exist in China?

(2) Which groups of people are entitled to language welfare? Through what procedures can they access such welfare? What rights and obligations should holders of language welfare have?

(3) What is the relationship between language welfare and other forms of social welfare?

(4) How should appropriate language welfare policies be formulated?

Language welfare constitutes an integral part of social welfare, and research on language welfare should be strengthened from a social welfare perspective. In advancing Chinese-style modernization, a substantial amount of language welfare will be required. For instance, as proposed in the 15th Five-Year Plan, efforts will be made to accelerate the development of a Healthy China and build a high-quality and efficient medical service system, which includes expanding the supply of rehabilitation care and hospice care services. This requires improving the language service capabilities and proficiency of rehabilitation and hospice care workers, and such capacity-building services fall under the category of language welfare. Likewise, expanding high-standard opening up and optimizing the domestic international business environment necessitates enhancing language welfare provisions for international visitors, among other areas.[1]

7. Future-Oriented Discipline Development in the Economics of Language

[Prof. Wang/Zhang]: You have always attached great importance to and actively promoted the development of the discipline of the economics of language in China. Could you please outline what achievements have been made in this area in China, and what the future directions are?

[Prof. Li]: Although the economics of language in China began relatively late, it has developed rapidly. Professor Huang Shao'an at Shandong University (regrettably, he has passed away, and is deeply missed) was the pioneer of language economics research in China. In 2006, he took the lead in establishing a doctoral program in "Language Economics", recruiting and training doctoral students in the field. His team initiated the China Language Economics Forum, which has now been held 16 times, and also established the Center for the Economics of Language at Shandong University. In 2010, the Beijing Municipal Language Commission in collaboration with Capital Normal University, established the "Beijing Language Industry Research Center", later renamed the "China Language Industry Research Institute", and launched the "China Language Industry Forum", which has now been held 10 times. In 2019, Capital Normal University was approved to establish a doctoral program in "Language Industry Studies". In 2022, Beijing Language and Culture University was approved to establish a doctoral program in "Language Resources Studies", and in the same year, Beijing Language and Culture University and several other universities were approved to

[1] Elaborated discussions on language consumption and language welfare are presented in Li Yuming's publications: "The new mission of linguistics: Delivering language dividends for the society (*Studies of the Chinese Language*, 2026 No.01)""Language Life and Study of Language Life (*Chinese Journal of Language Policy and Planning,*2016 No.03)""The Role of Language in an Accessible Society (*Chinese Journal of Language Policy and Planning*, 2022 No.05)""Research on Language Policies for People With Language Disorders in China (*Applied Linguistic*s, 2025 No.01)".

establish doctoral programs in "International Language Services." Guangzhou University initiated the "Advanced Forum on Language Services" in 2012, which has now been held 10 times. These four second-level doctoral programs are all cultivating high-level specialized talent related to language and economics, and the three specialized academic forums provide platforms for exchange in language economics research. In 2024, the 8th Discipline Evaluation Group of the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council and the National Steering Committee for Professional Degree Graduate Education issued the "Introduction to Graduate Education Disciplines and Basic Requirements for Degrees (Trial Version)," which split the former "Linguistics and Applied Linguistics" into two independent second-level disciplines: "Theoretical Linguistics" and "Applied Linguistics." In the disciplinary areas of applied linguistics, language services, language industries, and language economy are mentioned, thereby institutionally guiding and supporting interdisciplinary talent cultivation between linguistics and economics. In terms of academic research, significant progress has also been made in the study of language economics in China, yielding a series of research results in areas such as language ability and income, language poverty alleviation, language industries, and the productive factor value of language data.

As society enters the age of digital intelligence, language life is undergoing dramatic changes, and linguistics is taking on new academic and social missions. Contributions should be made in areas such as language data research, the testing and interpretation of machine language intelligence, the application of language intelligent products, new structural changes in language professions, and the discourse of language life in the digital intelligence era. There is an urgent need to optimize the development of linguistics as a discipline and to encourage the establishment of socially oriented branch disciplines and interdisciplinary fields with new academic foci. The economics of language should receive greater attention and be developed more rapidly. Research in language economics should accomplish several basic tasks:

First, research on the operational patterns of China's language economy should trace the development trajectory of China's language economy and construct a logical and theoretical framework for its development.

Second, research on the economic contribution of language to society should be strengthened. At present, organizations such as the China Language Industry Research Institute, the Translators Association of China has conducted survey-based estimates of the output value and scale of China's language industry and language service industry. It can be seen that China's language industry has made outstanding contributions to economic development. However, there remain some non-independent language industries and language-related economic sectors that cannot yet be statistically accounted for. Currently, the language economy and language industry are not yet included in the national economic statistical system.

Third, greater attention should be paid to the costs of language policies and the economic benefits they generate, and to identifying policy environments and measures conductive to fostering a thriving language economy. In the past, the evaluation of language policies focused mainly on social benefits. Now, there is a need to strengthen the economic evaluation of language policies. Examples include the cost-benefit analyses of promoting and popularizing the national common language and script in China, the economic evaluation

of foreign language education, and the input-output assessment of international Chinese language education. Additionally, China has implemented a series of policies to promote economic development. These policies should be examined from the perspective of language economics to assess whether they are conducive to fostering the development of the language economy.

Fourth, economic research on language data warrants further development. As the most important type of data, language data is a key factor of production in the digital age. However, economic research on language data is still in its infancy. Understanding how language data becomes a factor of production and how to unlock its value as a factor of production require exploring the value realization mechanisms of language data as a new type of production factor.[1]

[Prof. Wang/Zhang]: Thank you again, Professor Li, for your valuable insights. This interview has deepened our systematic understanding of language's economic attributes and value. We believe it will popularize awareness of the language economy among academics and the public. As you mentioned, language research should contribute language dividends to society—and in this regard, the economics of language has an crucial responsibility. Thank you again!

[Prof. Li]: My pleasure.

Funding: This article is one of the interim outcomes of the National Social Science Fund of China Later-stage Funding Project "The Economic Power of Language: Theory and Practice" (Project No. 23FYYB09), and the 2023 Research Project under the National Language Commission's "14th Five-Year Plan" for Scientific Research, "Research on the Construction of an Evaluation System for Public Language Services" (Project No. ZDI145-73).

Conflicts of Interest: the authors declare no conflict of interest.

ORCID

Wang Hailand ID https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4270-3185

Zhang Xuetong ID https://orcid.org/0009-0003-3058-959X

Reference

LI Yuming (2026).The new Mission of Linguistics: Delivering Language Dividends for the Society. *Studies of the Chinese Language*, 430 (1):1-16+139.

LI Yuming (2023).On the Issues of Language Data in the Era of Human-Machine Symbiosis. *Journal of Central Chi*

[1] A detailed elaboration of the views on 'the disciplinary construction of linguistic economics', can be found in the articles by LI Yuming, "Special Study: The Construction and Development of the Discipline of Chinese Linguistics (Chinese Journal of Language Policy and Planning, 2018 No.01)""The Conglomerate Nature of Linguistic Studies (Chinese Journal of Language Policy and Planning, 2018 No.01)""Three Questions on the Disciplinary Construction of Chinese Linguistics (China Language Strategies, 2024 No.01)""Problem Awareness, Discourse Turn and Discipline Issues of Linguistics (Journal of Guangzhou University (Social Science Edition), 2019 No.05)""Interdisciplinary Development of Linguistics in the Context of the New Liberal Arts (Foreign Language World, 2020 No.04)".

na Normal University (Humanities and Social Sciences), 62(05):135-143. DOI：https://doi.org/10.19992/j.cnki.1000-2456.2023.05.011.

LI Yuming (2021).Understanding the Economic Attributes of Language: Supporting Regional Economies and Free Trade Zones (Ports). *Applied Linguistics*, 3(00):15-19.

LI Yuming (2012).Understanding the Economic Attributes of Language.*Applied Linguistics*, (03):2-8. DOI: https://doi.org/10.16499/j.cnki.1003-5397.2012.03.008.

LI Yuming (2020).Data Age and Language Industry. *Journal of Shandong Normal University (Social Sciences)*, 65(05):87-98. DOI：https://doi.org/10.16456/j.cnki.1001-5973.2020.05.008.

LI Yuming (2016).Language Services and the Language Industry.*East Journal of Translation*, (04):4-8.

LI Yuming (2014).Language Services and Language Consumption. *Journal of Educational Development*, (07):93-94. DOI：https://doi.org/10.16215/j.cnki.cn44-1371/g4.2014.07.001.

LI Yuming (2025).Language Data is the Key Data in the Era of big Data.*Chinese Journal of Language Policy and Planning*, 10(06):1.

LI Yuming (2024),LIANG Jingtao.On the Function as a Factor of Production and Property Rights System Construction of Language Date. *Language Teaching and Linguistic Studies*, (02):1-11.

LI Yuming (2018).Reflections on the Relationship Between Language and Economy. *Language Industry Research*, (00):1-7.

LI Yuming (2023).Regional Language Planning and Regional Development. *Journal of Guangzhou University(Social Science Edition)*, 22(05):99-111.

LI Yuming.Building the Language Highway for Poverty Alleviation and Eradication. *Chinese Language Weekly*,2018-08-01(001).

LI Yuming, HUANG Xing, WANG Hui, et al (2018).Scholars Discuss 'Poverty Alleviation through Mandarin Popularization'. *Linguistic Sciences*, 2018, 17(04):356-367.

LI Yuming.The Theory and Practice of Language Poverty Alleviation[C]//ZHONGGUO XIUCI 2018.National Research Center for Language Norms and Standards,Beijing Language and Culture University; 2019:8-9. DOI：https://doi.org/10.26914/c.cnkihy.2019.026519.

LI Yuming (2018).Special Study: The Construction and Development of the Discipline of Chinese Linguistics. *Chinese Journal of Language Policy and Planning*, 3(01):14.

LI Yuming (2018).The Conglomerate Nature of Linguistic Studies. *Chinese Journal of Language Policy and Planning*, 3(01):15-24.

LI Yuming,QU Shaobing (2023).A Dialogue on Language Life and Language Services in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.*Journal of Guangzhou University(Social Science Edition)*, 22(01):29-39.

WANG Hailan, LI Yuming (2021).Emergency Language Service Needs in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.*Language Policy and Planning*, (02):4-16+121.

LI Yuming,WANG Hailan (2020).Four fundamental language constructions for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.*Chinese Journal of Language Policy and Planning*, 5(01):11-21. DOI：https://doi.org/10.19689/j.cnki.cn10-1361/h.20200101.