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What "Getting By with English" Costs: Fieldworkers' Language Choices and Organizational Language Policy

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Abstract: When a development worker faces the decision of which language to use, the choice often depends on the belief that English is the natural and most efficient medium for international communication. This paper argues that cost-benefit analyses of language choices which tend to favor English ignore the hidden costs of English use. In order to fully appreciate the effect of choosing English, the linguistic ecology and the indexical field of the host community, as well as the limits of field interpretation, must be taken into account. Language policies for development organizations support fieldworkers to learn and use host languages when English use is not the optimal choice. Based on a study of one organization's language policy, and a sociolinguistic understanding of language choice, this paper also proposes design principles for effective organizational language policies.

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Introduction

The notion of hidden costs - facts whose consequences currently are absent from cost-benefit analyses of policies – frequently appears in arguments for social or institutional change. For example, public attention has focused on "hidden costs" to society and to the environment of fossil fuels (Nuccitelli, 2015), costs which distort the ability to rationally choose among different energy sources. In this paper I argue that similar "hidden costs" are inherent to development workers' language choice and language learning practices. Official (in policy documents) and ad-hoc (in momentary decision-making) "cost-benefit" analyses both tend to leave out several important sociolinguistic considerations from decisions about language.

Much of the work on language policy has analyzed policy decisions made at the national or regional scale – particularly within governmental (Erling & Seargeant, 2013; Schmidt, 2006, Vavrus, 2002) and educational (Benson, 2013; Bruthiaux, 2008; Ferguson, 2013; Lamb 2011) systems. Such work engages the neo-liberal turn in social sciences, which focuses on the free market and profit-seeking private enterprise, and which has particularly impacted development policy (Jessop, 2002; Canagarajah, 2013). Work analyzing language policy at the organizational scale has focused on corporations (Dhir & Goke-Pariola, 2002; Feely & Harzing, 2003; Thomas, 2008). However, studies on language policies within development organizations, and particularly on the habits of their workers "on the ground" are noticeably absent.

This paper argues for expanding the range of factors taken into account as organizations develop institutional language policy and human resources strategies. While neo-liberal concepts such as efficiency, return on investment, and ownership are non-negotiable paradigms for policy and funding decisions, sociolinguistic factors are rarely considered. Linguistic ecology, indexicality and investment are notions from sociolinguistics which complicate the prevailing attitude that English is the natural and most efficient medium for intercultural exchange. After introducing these factors, this paper considers findings from a three-year study of one development organization's experience implementing an institutional language acquisition policy. Finally, practical policy implications for both institutional and individual decision-making are suggested, based on a more complete model for weighing the costs and benefits of fieldworkers' language choices.

Terminology

Although many people interact cross-culturally, this paper focuses on cross-cultural fieldworkers acquiring a host language later in life. I define *fieldwork* as an assignment, often temporary, which requires an individual to leave their primary culture of residence to work in a different culture and different language. Since 'fieldwork' is a widely accepted term in many fields and occupations, I use 'fieldwork(er)' despite potential pejorative connotations of uncivilized backcountry. I intentionally use the term *host language* instead of field or target language, because 'host' foregrounds the fieldworker's dependence and imposition on someone else's hospitality, time, space and energy. While 'target' is the default term in second language research, it suggests an active fieldworker being sent to 'hit' the passive receiving culture, downplaying mutual influence. The hospitality metaphor also reminds policymakers and development workers that there are cultural rules for being a good host and for being a good guest. It is possible for fieldworkers, like party guests, to overstay their host's welcome.

Sociolinguistic Factors in Fieldworkers' Language Behavior

A development worker in the 19th century (typically a missionary, health or education worker) spent several decades in one place. Development workers in this era were expected to proficiently acquire the host linguaculture (Risager, 2006), the set of language practices through which social actions are habitually carried out. Linguacultural proficiency enables fieldworkers to construct a legitimate role (Lave & Wenger, 1991) within their host community. Changed expectations for 21st century development workers have powerful consequences for language learning. A development project is now rarely seen as requiring a permanent move to or a decades-long sojourn in the host culture. Increasingly, fieldworkers are sent to a host culture for just long enough to ensure "buy-in" or "ownership" (in neo-liberal parlance) of that project among host nationals. The changed time scale for development work has tended to favor English use, and downplay the need for learning host languages. In this section I make a case about what these changes have cost in terms of development effectiveness.
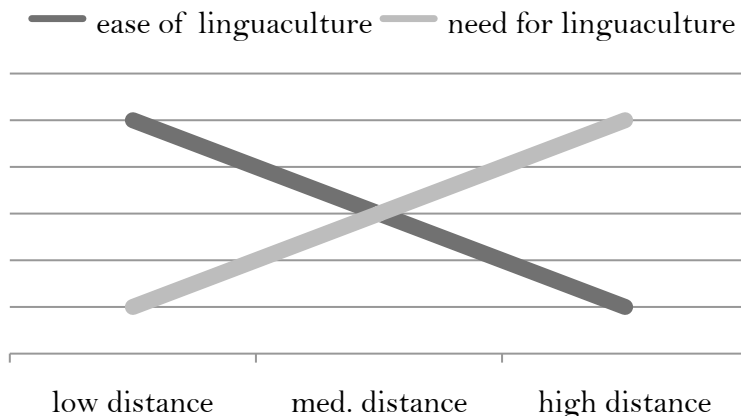
Felt Need, Felt Cost, and Linguacultural Distance

Motivation for language learning depends on an individual's ability to imagine themselves as a proficient speaker of the language and on the value that individual attaches to that accomplishment (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2009). This 'felt need' for (Dua, 1985) is the key to understanding language policy. As shown in Figure 1, the decrease in the length of projects corresponds to a decreased felt need, deincentivizing the often unexpectedly hard work of language learning.
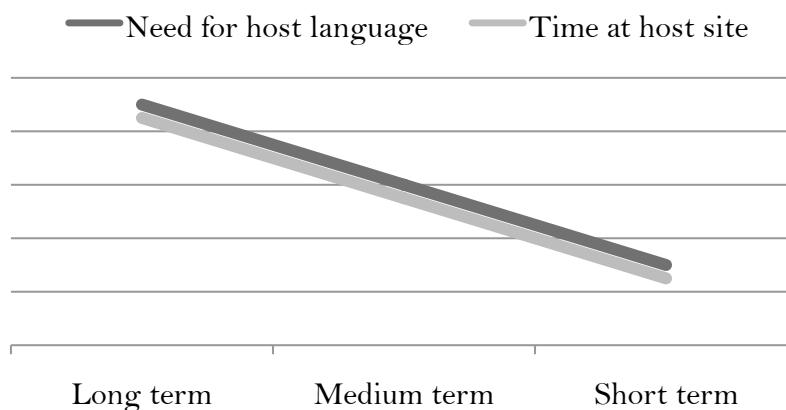
Figure 1: As the duration of a project decreases, so does the felt need for learning the host language.

Besides felt need, an individual's expectancy of success also correlates with perceived linguistic (Chiswick & Miller, 2005, 2012) or linguacultural (Risager, 2005) distance. An American fieldworker may notice that learning Afrikaans is much easier than learning Xhosa sue to linguistic similarity, and that the cultural practices of Finns might be more familiar than those of English-speaking Pakistanis due to cultural similarities. Learning a linguaculture close to a fieldworkers' own affords the fieldworker greater progress from less effort than learning a very different one does (Figure 2).

Figure 2: As linguacultural distance increases, so does the need for and difficulty of learning

In a purely neo-liberal approach to language policy, the cost-benefit analysis for language learning depends primarily on felt need (benefit) and linguacultural distance (cost).   If the challenge presented by learning the language is minimal, and the length of stay in the host culture long enough to merit the challenge, the benefits of learning outweigh the costs.

Linguistic Ecology

A more complete cost-benefit analysis depends on understanding the linguistic ecology (Muhlhausler, 1996) – which languages are spoken by whom to whom and in what contexts. The earliest models of linguistic ecology framework dealt with *diglossic* situations (Ferguson, 1959; Fishman,1980), where an overtly prestigious language (H) dominated official contexts of power, with a less, or covertly, prestigious language (L) found in informal vernacular settings. Modern work on linguistic ecology (van Lier, 2004) has moved beyond simplistic diglossic models to analyze complex linguistic ecosystems, in which many languages are used, divided among many domains of life. DeSwaan (2001) and Crystal (2003) noted that globalization gives English, the 'hypercentral' language, a footprint almost everywhere on earth, even in areas never colonized by English-speaking powers. Figure 3 presents a sample situation from the Nilgiri Hills of Tamil Nadu, India (Hockings, 1979), chosen to represent the linguistic complexity of many locales hosting development workers:
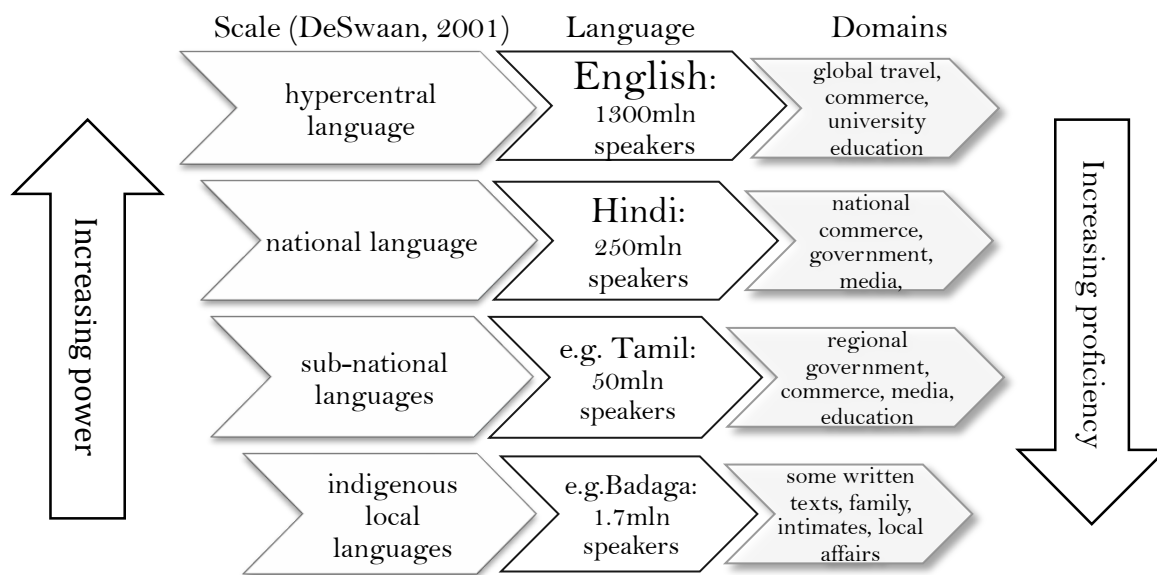
Scale (DeSwaan, 2001)   Language   Domains

hypercentral language	English: 1300mln speakers	global travel, commerce, university education
national language	Hindi: 250mln speakers	national commerce, government, media,
sub-national languages	e.g. Tamil: 50mln speakers	regional government, commerce, media, education
indigenous local languages	e.g.Badaga: 1.7mln speakers	some written texts, family, intimates, local affairs

Increasing power ↑   *Increasing proficiency* ↓

Figure 3. Hierarchical linguistic ecosystem of the Nilgiri Hills

English, the former colonial language, is found even in this relatively peripheral community. A fieldworker may then justify using English, and not learning the other, more geographically-localized languages. However, despite four languages (at least) being present, not all community members speak all four, or speak them equally well. Also, languages further up in the hierarchy associated more with official power, thus proficiency in those bestowed greater linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1992; Rassool, 2013). Precisely because Badaga confers little linguistic capital, English-speaking development workers may most need to engage those indigenous language speakers whose proficiency in the high-prestige widely-circulating languages is limited (Mohanty, 2009).

Figure 3 artificially separates languages, each confined to a clear hierarchical rank. However, in reality, languages mix within social spaces, within the mental grammar of each speaker, and within the utterances those speakers produce. These language contact phenomena – borrowing, code-switching, code-mixing, translanguaging and creolization – are omnipresent in multilingual settings (Blommaert, 2010). Intense and prolonged language contact makes it difficult or unnatural for multilinguals to speak 'pure' languages, which exist only in textbooks and the minds of language planners (Brunstad, 2003). For example, mixing between Swahili and English has proven an obstacle for development work (Manal-Hanak, 2005). A fieldworker acquiring 'pure' Tamil from a textbook likely finds that in multilingual India, so-called Tamil contains accents of, borrowings from, and switches into the other languages. Speaking an imaginary "pure" Tamil perhaps gets one understood, but is insufficient to understand the full range of meaning conveyed by those who consider themselves to be speaking in Tamil.

Prolonged language contact leads languages to innovate, thus developing competing standards or norms in different communities. The robust field of World Englishes has carefully documented this *polycentricity* for English, examining variation within English on every linguistic level, from the phonetics to vocabulary to grammar to overarching language ideologies. A fieldworker seeking "English" speakers soon discovers how considerably the

Englishes spoken by the fieldworker and their host partner differ, as misunderstandings emerge even within English-mediated interaction (Gumperz & Roberts, 1991). Not every English is equally valued in a particular context; varieties of English (and of Hindi, Tamil, etc.) are themselves stratified by prestige, and divided among different domains of community life.

Languages differ not only by proficiency level or rank in the world language system, but also by a speaker's strength of identification with that language. Figure 4 maps a multilingual's language repertoire onto Kwast (1981)'s model of culture:

DeSwaan's language rank	Average proficiency level	Kwast's layers of culture
Hypercentral language (English)	Least proficiency – least affiliation	Behavior (what is done)
Central language (e.g. Hindi)	Less proficiency	Values (what is good/best)
Regional language (e.g. Tamil)	More proficiency	Beliefs (what is true)
Local language (e.g. Badaga)	Greatest proficiency – greatest affiliation "heart language"	Worldview (what is real)

Figure 4. Engaging deeper levels of culture requires using languages of stronger affiliation and greater host proficiency.

The complicated language of persuasion, reasoning, philosophical positions, historical traditions, and spiritual consequences – all crucial for development work to succeed - requires a higher degree of proficiency. In this model, an English-monolingual fieldworker can engage a Badaga speaker in English only in basic communication about concrete actions in the here-and-now (behavior). Engaging the Badaga-speaker at the deeper levels of morality, ideology, and worldview would require proficiency in the more local languages. The *heart language* of deepest affiliation – the language one cries, prays, and dreams in – is rarely the national or global prestige variety.

In summary, complicated realities of the linguistic ecosystem complicate the statement "they speak English there." Where English is spoken, it is often the language of power, spoken by a limited group of people, to a limited extent, and with limited self-affiliation. "English there" may vary considerably from the English spoken by the fieldworker, and mixed to varying extents with elements of other co-existing languages.

Indexical Level of Language

Another cost of "getting by with English", is the loss of deeper levels of meaning-making, as a consequence of seeking easy gains on the propositional. The *propositional level* of meaning-making refers to the semantic ideas encoded into language. For example, the utterances "I washed the car", "the car was washed by me", and "the car is what I washed" all convey the same proposition – that the speaker used water to make the car clean. Although the propositional content is equivalent, the choice among these forms conveys subtleties of context

and emphasis (i.e. the *pragmatic level* of meaning-making). Such pragmatic decisions are hard enough to master in adulthood-learned languages, yet what sociolinguists call the indexical level is even more complex. Fieldworkers' English use may facilitate propositional transmission, but at the expense of pragmatically and indexically adept communication.

In sociolinguistic theory, any language choice is connected to particular social attributes via ideologies about the group associated with that language choice (Silverstein, 2003). This connection between language choice and attribute via ideologies is called an *indexical link*. For example, the pronoun "y'all" is associated by most Americans with the Southern United States. Strong ideologies circulate about the people who live in the Southern US, ranging from charming and friendly to ignorant and prejudiced. The association of "y'all" with Southerners and of Southerners with charm/prejudice allows a speaker to choose to use "y'all" in order to come across as friendly or ignorant, depending on the listeners' ideologies about Southerners. Often speakers are not conscious of the key role played by ideologies about groups of people (i.e. Southerners) in the indexical link. As speakers erase this people-attribute ideology, "y'all" use comes to directly index friendliness or ignorance in the minds of the hearers, as illustrated in Figure 5:
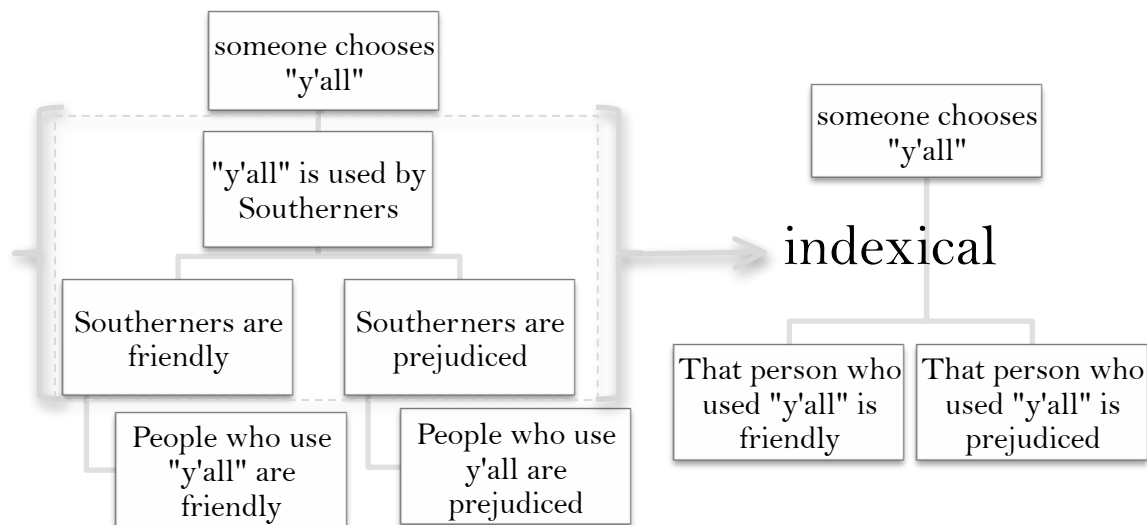

Figure 5: Indexical link is formed as ideologies about a population get erased

The choice of English over another language is subject to similar indexical processes as the choice of "y'all" over "you guys". English is associated with a particular population, and that population evokes certain attributes, so English use itself comes to index those attributes. Further indexical links connect those attributes with others, and so on, creating what is known as an *indexical field* (Eckert, 2008). The indexical field for a language choice is a product of the histories of languages in a community and ideologies about the groups who have used them. One possible indexical field for English at a host site is depicted in Figure 6:
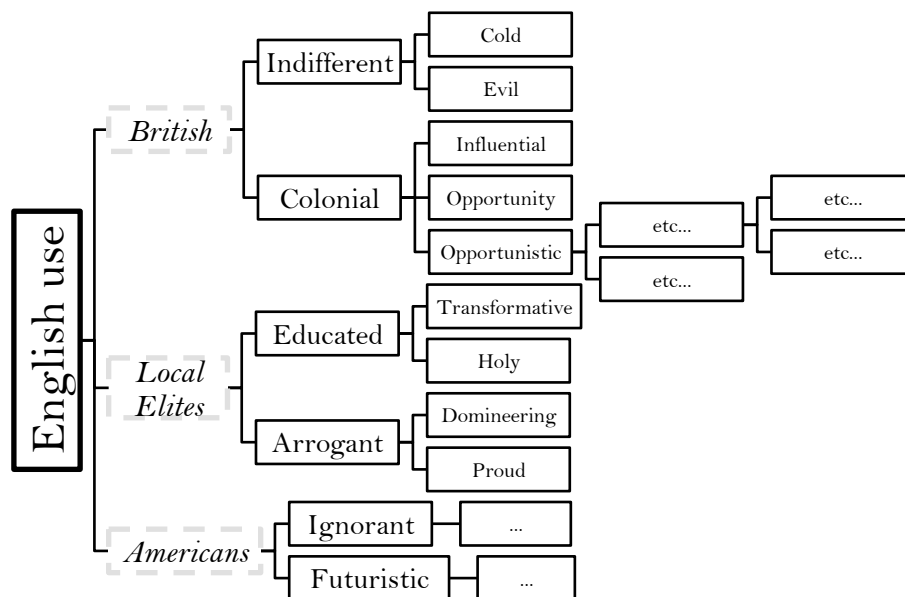
Figure 6: Hypothetical indexical field for English, connecting English to 1st, 2nd, nth order
          attributes via indexical links

As can be seen, the indexical field becomes a semiotic minefield, bewildering the development
worker with a range of unforeseen possible attributions activated simply by choosing to use
English. Depending on the context and who is speaking, different paths through the indexical
field are activated. The choice of English may index imperialism (Robinson, 1995) which in
turn indexes opportunism. In a different context English may index education, which in turn
indexes superiority or unapproachability. Given the indexical field, what may have seemed like
merely an efficient choice for the development worker creates strong, yet often largely
subconscious, impressions and attributions in the minds of their hosts. These impressions can
be crucial to how the fieldworker and development work itself is received, evaluated, idealized,
and caricatured within the host community.

I observed one concrete example of this, from an English-speaking fieldworker who used
Russian to address Azerbaijani youth. This American, who had worked in Russia for many
years, selected Russian over English to index shared experience of living in the former Soviet
Union. Not speaking much Azerbaijani, Russian was the most local language in which she
could convey her message and show solidarity. However, knowing that this fieldworker was
American, the Azerbaijani youth perceived Russian use differently. To them, Russian indexed
imperialism, and thus condescension and backwardness. The fieldworker calculated the
indexical chain to be:

English → Americans → Far-away places → Distant → Aloof

Russian → All former Soviet people → Shared experiences → Solidarity

Whereas for the Azerbaijani youth, their indexical chain was:

Russian → Russians → Former occupying power → Aloof

English → Globalized youth → Cutting-edge → Coolness → Solidarity

Russian use, intended as a solidarity move, ended up alienating the Azerbaijani addressees, who would have preferred her to speak in English. In Sarajevo, a similar situation led to a "reverse" conversation, wherein the Bosnians consistently spoke English to an American fieldworker, who consistently replied in Bosnian. The indexical field conditioned this sparring over the code. The Bosnians spoke English to index intelligent cosmopolitanism, while to the American Bosnian use indexed solidarity, openness and respect.

Language choice has indexical meaning, but so do word choices like "y'all" use within a language. A highly proficient speaker of a language selects language forms which index exactly those attributes that the speaker wants to ascribe to themselves in a given situation. For example, an expression of gratitude like "thanks dude, you are awesome," indexes an intimate yet relaxed masculine solidarity, while "I don't know what to say sir – I'm truly grateful," indexes respectful and formal gratitude to a superior. Even if a limited English-proficient host community speaker manages to understand the propositional content of a fieldworker's utterance, they would unlikely be proficient at interpreting the indexical content. Forcing the host partners to speak in English also robs them of the ability to exploit the rich indexical resources for conveying stance, attitude, and identity, which are available to them in their native languages.

Limits of Interpretation

Even if host partners speak some English, development organizations may be keenly aware that expecting host partners to use or improve their English has complicated historical resonances of colonialism and exploitation. If a fieldworker does not know the host language, the most common solution then is to use an English-to-host-language translator (written texts) or interpreter (oral speech). This may indeed be an efficient if not frictionless solution, yet also comes with several hidden costs.

Development work depends crucially not only on correctly understanding proposed projects, but also on the attitudes, identities, and stances being communicated. Conversation analysis (Gumperz & Roberts, 1991) has illustrated the microgenesis of misunderstanding in interactions between speakers from different communities of practice. When such speakers must communicate via an interpreter, one belonging perhaps to neither of the speakers' primary communities of practice, misunderstandings are bound to result. Anyone who has served as an interpreter understands the considerable difficulty of rendering even the propositional content of a message in real time, let alone the pragmatic and indexical content. These last two levels are crucial for the framing of a message (Goffman, 1974) – the interpretive schema which are activated by the speaker's context and by which listeners make sense of what they think they heard. This concern is compounded by the fact that the interpreters and translators relied on in the field are rarely trained in this skill. Often individuals bilingual to varying extents are pressed into service as interpreters out of necessity; effective interpretation requires more than bilingual proficiency and content knowledge.

Another concern about using interpreters is that these individuals may have conflicting *investments*. A career interpreter, well-remunerated for their services, may be invested in maintaining a high standard of performance and displaying their membership in a community of trained professionals. Trained interpreters, due to their rarity and service cost, are employed less often than wished in oral fieldwork settings. Ad hoc or novice interpreters, whose professional training lies elsewhere, are more common. Novice interpreters may skillfully balance competing demands: impressing the fieldworkers who control access to capital and opportunity, reconstructing the fieldworker's message to make it more palatable to a community, not losing face within their own community, or protecting the fieldworker by withholding potentially face-threatening information. While all this represents a kind of language mastery, it is not investment in communicating the propositional, pragmatic and indexical content of the message completely faithfully. Interpreters' own ideologies or preconceptions about communities also affect the interpretation. French (2009) documents how messages in Truth & Reconciliation Commission trials were substantively transformed as they moved from oral accounts in Mayan language through oral and written Spanish, and then into written English.

A final concern is that interpretation distances two interlocutors by introducing both a physical intermediary and a significant time lag between the production and comprehension of a message. Natural conversation exhibits a high degree of overlap, collaborative interruption, and demonstrations of alignment or disalignment via discourse markers, gestures and non-speech noises (Goodwin, 2007). This interactive feedback from the listener enables a speaker to adjust what he or she is saying mid-utterance. Consecutive interpretation (more common than simultaneous in fieldwork) imposes artificial wait time, and forces each speaker to compose his or her message in isolation, without any ongoing and interactive feedback from listeners.

Revised Cost-Benefit Analysis

Including sociolinguistic factors like linguistic ecology and indexicality significantly alters the cost-benefit analysis for language choice, unmasking some "hidden costs" of using English. If language is seen only as communicating propositional content efficiently, a fieldworker may choose a language by the following formula:

Costs (of learning/using host language):
- If linguacultural distance is high, cost feels **high**
- If fieldworkers aren't given time, money, tools to support language learning, cost feels **high**

Benefits:
- If stay in host culture is short- or medium-term, benefit feels **low**
- If interpretation is reliable, benefit feels **low**

In such a scenario, the felt costs of learning the host language would significantly outweigh the felt benefits for learning it. Thus, the felt need for language acquisition is low and the fieldworker will likely decide to "get by" with English.

If the sociolinguistic complexity presented in the previous situation is factored in, the felt benefits change even if the felt costs remain the same:

<u>Benefits</u> (of learning/using host language):
- If stay in host culture is short- or medium-term, benefit feels **low**
- If fewer people understand fewer things in English than previously supposed, benefit feels **higher**
- If the indexical level of communication is lost by using English, benefit feels **higher**
- If using English excludes the people who are already most marginalized, benefit feels **higher**
- If deeper-level engagement than behavior change requires host language, benefit feels **higher**
- If interpretation from/into English is problematic, benefit feels **higher**

In this calculation, the fieldworker's sense of what is to be gained by learning and using host languages increases dramatically, perhaps enough to offset the significant obstacles of learning and trying to use the host language.

Case Study: One Organization's Language Policy

In this section I analyze one organization to argue for adoption of the revised cost-benefit analysis above. Research on language policy in development has focused on state-level actors – governments and education systems – with little work suggesting policies development organizations themselves could implement to encourage their personnel to effectively learn and use host languages. Partly to fill this gap, I conducted a three-year study (Sawin, 2013) of one large international organization, Love the World (a pseudonym), an organization committed materially and philosophically to their fieldworkers' language learning. The study focused on fieldworkers' language behaviors, and the extent to which they were shaped by organizational policies at the institutional, regional and local levels. In this section I will describe my methodology, the organization and its policy, and factors which confounded policy implementation.

Love the World is a large organization, with over 20,000 employees. Their international efforts are an outgrowth of their operations in the United States, so while staff hail from over 150 countries, the largest group of new fieldworkers are Americans, sent to host sites all over the world. Typically, novice fieldworkers have a one-two year internship, after which they can decide to "go long term." Love the World fieldworkers have great agency in deciding on projects, often supporting local faith communities as they engage youth and university students, but also working in education, with refugees and migrants, and providing family services.

Findings emerge from qualitative analysis of pre-field interviews, observations of pre-field trainings, interviews by distance and on-site (in Central and Eastern Europe) with over 70 fieldworkers, and from field observations, along with analyzing institutional policy and language learning materials. Pre-field interviews, which followed the internship but preceded training for long-term placements, revealed a high degree of motivation for language learning. Fieldworkers passionately articulated their felt need for the host language, and the degree to their projects' success depended on host language acquisition.

Institutional policy also incentivized language learning for long-term workers through a carrots-and-stick approach. Generously, fieldworkers are to be free to spend their first two

years "in language," protected from other duties distracting them from language learning acquisition. In addition, fieldworkers are given three days of pre-field training about language learning and assigned to language coaches who resource their learning. Fieldworkers are not permitted to "move on" to working on their individual or team projects until they can demonstrate intermediate host language proficiency.

Despite being motivated learners who expressed a strong desire and clear felt need for language, and despite support from a strong language policy, Love the World workers rarely attain their proficiency goals, and have earned a reputation among peer organizations for being "bad at language." Several factors in the institutional policy as well as in the language ecology helped create over-reliance on English and underperformance in the host languages.

Tellingly, the level of support in practice did not match that outlined in the policy. Fieldworkers either chose to seek out, or were pushed into, English-medium tasks, projects and sub-communities long before demonstrating proficiency. Since no level of management was designated responsible for enforcing language-learning policy, the global office delegated this job to regional offices, the regional to national, and the national to local leaders. Not infrequently, those fieldworkers promoted to higher administrative roles admitted that they themselves felt unsuccessful as language learners, and were reticent to enforce language policy. Local leaders also hesitated to enforce language policy over their close associates, and lacked direct access to the reservoirs of knowledge of best practices which accrued at the institution's global-level offices.

Since few in charge of personnel considered language acquisition skills on par with emotional, financial or interpersonal skills, novice fieldworkers received minimal training in structuring and managing their personal language acquisition. This minimal intervention was insufficient to overwrite ineffective language habits fieldworkers acquired in past university language courses or their short-term internships. Ironically, interning fieldworkers were told that language learning would distract from the immediate short-term projects. Fieldworkers were advised to rely on English and seek out host partners who could also use English. When these interns chose to return to those same host sites as long-term fieldworkers, they had grown accustomed to not needing the host language. Their patterns of interaction and activity developed along paths of least resistance to English. Escaping these paths proved very difficult for the fieldworkers, even when strongly supported to learn and use the host language.

Those individuals in the host community who did speak English often associated with fieldworkers partly to improve their English, and were invested in a certain indexical value for English use – English as the language of cosmopolitan, successful, and forward-looking professionals. In relationships with these individuals, fieldworkers' attempts to use the host language were frequently resisted or rebuffed. Host partners' discouragements - "Why would anyone learn Slovak?", "No one speaks Bosnian outside of Bosnia!", "Hungarian is too hard for foreigners to learn!" – justified fieldworkers' continued English use. Some proficient English-speakers' investments in partnering with fieldworkers were less in transforming their local community and more in gathering enough symbolic or financial capital from them to emigrate. Assurances to and by fieldworkers that "English is enough," thus facilitated brain drain, slowed language acquisition, and confined them to limited domains of host community life. For transient outsiders, English use is tolerated, expected, or even encouraged, but once a fieldworker demonstrates that they are serious about engaging the host community, the

indexical field for English turns against them. Initial encouragements of "wow, you know a little of our language!" turn disapproving – "why do you know so little of our language?"

In summary, despite desire to learn host languages, and supportive organizational policy, the strong forces of linguistic gravity (Blommaert, 2010 p. 17) tend to pull fieldworkers' interactions towards English. Effective language acquisition policy has buy-in from all levels of a development organization, and equips fieldworkers with the methods and means to pursue language acquisition even if some in the host community and their own supervisors doubt they will actually learn it.

Practical Applications for Organizational Policy

In light of both the revised cost-benefit analysis presented above and Love the World's experience with organizational language policy, I propose five practical applications for both organizational policy makers and individual fieldworkers learning and using host languages.

1) Understand the linguistic ecology.

Surface-level facts, anecdotal reports, or observations of the linguistic landscape, may mislead fieldworkers into thinking, "needn't worry, they speak English in {Dubai/Nairobi/ etc…}", when in fact not everyone speaks English, not in the same way, not in all spaces, not for all activities (Figure 3), not with the same depth of affiliation (Figure 4) and not within the same indexical field (Figure 6). Fieldworkers should thus acquaint themselves with ethnographic work documenting the local linguistic ecology and indexical resonances of languages in their host site. Such work (often by linguistic anthropologists) is available in some form for most communities. One cannot understand what the act of speaking English means in a community without understanding what the act of speaking anything else also means.

2) Discourage reliance on informal/ad hoc interpretation.

Interpretation works best when interpreters have had deep encounters with both the culture of the speaker and the culture of the listeners, and are trained in rendering the propositional, pragmatic and indexical content of a message. Professional interpreters are invested in their identity as a professional, avoiding the ethical pitfalls of altering messages for or against the groups involved. Ad hoc interpreters may be inexperienced in managing interaction, may lack experiential depth with both cultures to decode and convey pragmatic and indexical information, and may be compromised by their personal investments and social memberships towards or against the fieldworker or the host community. Being multilingual does not sufficiently qualify one to carry out the highly demanding task of community interpreting (Rudvin, 2007).

3) Support fieldworkers for language acquisition.

Love the World, as is the case for many development organizations, made great investments in their personnel's emotional health, intercultural sensitivity, professional skills and financial security. Yet regarding language acquisition, fieldworkers were essentially left to their own devices. Without training in how to learn and retain languages effectively, both in the classroom and in the field, language support in the form of work-release or course tuition will

probably be ineffective. Development personnel *do* need both work-release from English-mediated tasks and access to instruction. More essential, however, are an institutional culture valuing language acquisition, strong accountability for setting and meeting personal language goals, tools for managing their personal language acquisition project, and incentives for continuing improvement. Such goals should be integrated into the overall personnel hiring, retention, and promotion plan for fieldworkers. Language goals for short-term workers need to consider the possibility that they will become long-term workers and important assets.

4) "Climb the ladder" of language in conversation.

A fieldworker can still effectively rely on English, or even use an interpreter while sidestepping some of the contingent limitations using a method I call *climbing the linguistic ladder.* Figure 3 depicted how the languages and dialects that form the host community's repertoire are hierarchically organized. Climbing the ladder involves saying as much possible in the most local language, before switching up to the larger-scaled language, and so on, settling on English as a last resort, and only after a willingness to speak the other languages has been demonstrated. The languages in the ladder will depend on the linguistic ecosystem; in Haiti, the ladder may be [Haitian Creole → French → English], while in Kazakhstan [Kazakh → Russian → English]. A possible progression for our Nilgiri Hills scenario is given below:

1. [*Speaking Badaga*], greet the listener(s)
2. [*Speaking Badaga*], apologize for not knowing Badaga well and negotiate permission to use Tamil
3. [*Speaking Tamil*], continue, perhaps introducing the goals for the interaction (using a trained Tamil-Badaga interpreter if necessary)
4. [*Speaking Tamil*], ask permission - if and when a fieldworker's Tamil becomes insufficient to convey more complex ideas - to switch into English
5. [*Speaking English*], carry on the conversation using interpretation (however if no English-Badaga interpreter is available, an English-Tamil and Tamil-Badaga interpreter are both required, increasing risk of miscommunication)

5) Make sure sending a fieldworker is really necessary.

While fieldworkers enjoy field placements, and firsthand observation can be valuable, gathering information from, negotiating plans with, and generating investment among beneficiaries of a development project is better done by a trained, childhood-learned speaker of the host language(s) than a fieldworker from the global north. A fieldworker's specialist expertise may appear indispensable, but if that fieldworker cannot pass their expertise to a member of the host culture, they probably cannot train the host community to sustainably carry out the project either.

Depending on their proficiency, fieldworkers may cycle through the other languages relatively quickly before landing on English, or they may be able to carry on in Tamil or Hindi, with only occasional breakthroughs into English. A fieldworker may feel more invested in developing proficiency in more widely-used languages like Tamil or Hindi than Badaga, particularly if their work involves many field sites across Tamil Nadu province or across all India.

This "climb the ladder" strategy alters the framing (Goffman, 1974) for the conversation. The fieldworker demonstrates a multilingualism (even if symbolically) that matches the local linguistic ecology. English use is less likely to activate negative indexical values if arrived at only after having displayed proficiency in the other languages, accompanied by apologies and permission. Languages are also mixed, as they organically would be in the community. Interpreters are engaged only after the host community has had a chance to hear speech in their own language(s), spoken in the fieldworker's own voice. This mitigates the distancing nature of interpretation.
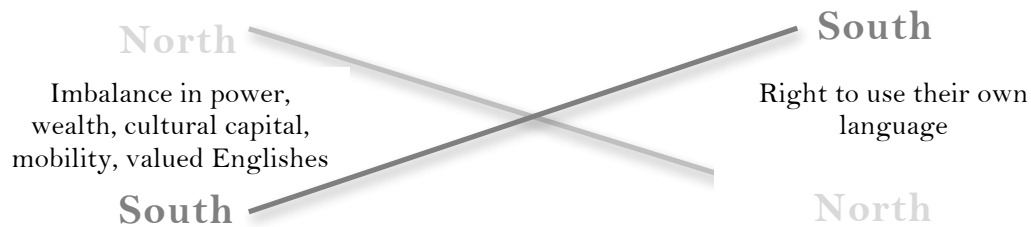
Conclusions

I have demonstrated how considering 1) English's place in the local linguistic ecology, 2) the importance of pragmatic and indexical meaning-making, and 3) the limits of interpretation combine to incentivize host language use for development workers, even in a world where English is increasingly understood. One final note on the ethical consequences of "getting by with English" seems in order. Although partnerships between workers from the global North (the developed world) and the global South (the developing world) are a common goal of development work (Ashman, 2001; Martin & Griffiths, 2012), in such partnerships, the Northerner almost always has the semiotic upper hand. The Northerner has more access to financial capital, mobility, technology, and depositories of knowledge. Northerners tend to be the ones disbursing this capital in developing situations, creating systems and ideas which their Southern partners are expected to buy into. Northerners can more easily acquire visas, and have the wherewithal to attend language schools and pursue language instruction in their free time. When the Northerner also gets the linguistic upper hand, by communicating in their heart language, while forcing Southern partners to use an adulthood acquired language, this simply exacerbates these systemic global inequalities which development work seeks to alleviate.

The Northerner gets to devote their language attention to carefully composing English utterances in ways that are propositionally, pragmatically, and indexically complex. The Southerner may be expected to improvise in communication using a thinly-stretched grammar and threadbare vocabulary. In speaking, the Southerner may be allocating their memory and language processing power to just communicating the present turn, while the Northerner can focus on communicating persuasively and composing the next few moves in the interaction. In listening, the Southerner has to work hard to parse the propositional content of the Northerner's utterance, let alone tease out the identities, attitudes, and stances being indexed. The very act of speaking in English may index something very different to the host community than to the fieldworker. Even if both parties are proficient in English, the Englishes of the North enjoy prestige in the linguistic market (Blommaert, 2009), whereas the Englishes of the South are mocked as broken or accented (Canagarajah, 2005, 2006) or treated as non-English-pidgins, patois, and vernaculars.

What if the gift of communicating in their own language were given to the partner with the playing field tipped steeply against them (Figure 7)? What if the English-speaker set aside what felt 'efficient' – the right to communicate in English – and were willing to let the field be tipped against them in the one area of language? If the Northerner, the English speaker, really wants to do something about global inequality, the most powerful step may be in his or her own language choice.

North   South

Imbalance in power,   Right to use their own
wealth, cultural capital,   language
mobility, valued Englishes
South   North

Figure 7: How speaking in the languages of the South can offset a North-favoring imbalanced
    interaction

In fact, communicating in a less-than-proficient language can sometimes benefit host
communities, necessitating clearer and simpler communication. In such situations, fieldworkers
enlist the aid of others to negotiate communication gaps and breakdowns, creating a more
collaborative discussion while facilitating language acquisition. Speaking in a less-than-
proficient language illustrates investment in an idea so deep that a fieldworker is willing to do
the hard work of communicating it, even when it costs them their pride.

There will always be situations where "getting by in English" is the only possible option. Lack
of advance notice, extreme shortness of fieldstay, and lack of opportunity for pre-field learning
may conspire against the fieldworker's desire to learn and use local languages whenever
possible. I hope that fieldworkers at least appreciate the consequences of their seemingly
expedient choice, and that effective organizational language policy makes these situations as
rare as possible.

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