

Interest, Power, and Attitudes Toward International Communication: The Language Choices of Chinese Provincial Government Websites

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Abstract

This study investigated the language choices of provincial governments in China by employing the concepts of interest, norm, and power within the Language Management Theory (LMT) framework. We approached this issue by examining which language options were presented on the websites of 31 provincial governments in China (Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan not included), and found that 11 offered Chinese versions only, 16 offered both Chinese and English versions, and only four offered Chinese and multiple foreign language versions. For both the governments and international visitors, subsequent analysis suggested that additional language versions facilitated the fulfillment of communicative and symbolic interests. However, this entailed a higher loss of pecuniary interest from a government-based perspective. Here, the voluntary abandonment of pecuniary interest indicated both a lower power position and a more open attitude toward international communication. In summary, the data showed that not all provincial governments in China were ready to embrace globalization in the context of cyberspace.

Keywords

languages in cyberspace | multilingualism in China | norms | Language Management Theory | English

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INTRODUCTION

Linguistic landscape research emerged as an independent academic field at the end of the 20th century.¹ It analyzes language displayed in public spheres, especially as a way to identify social power relations behind linguistic distributions.² Over the last decade, however, the area of interest has expanded from urban physical spaces to public spaces of all types, with investigations on semiotic forms like static texts, broadcast sounds, mobile signs, visual images,³ and virtual worlds that are accessible through the Internet.⁴ This study investigated one of the more formal sectors of online language usage by focusing on provincial government websites in China. Specifically, we examined relative power relations between web makers and their target audiences, in particular, foreign visitors. By examining the possible schemes of language choices and language combinations, the aim of the study was to reveal the attitudes these provincial governments hold toward the idea of international communication.

CONCEPTS AND METHODS

Prior research on power in language usage

Sociolinguists have been researching power relations in language usage since the latter half of the 20th century. To a large extent, these interests have echoed a thriving post-modern ideology advocating for the decentralization and recognition of minorities. Linguists regard it as their responsibility to reveal

¹ Rodrigue Landry and Richard Y. Bourhis, "Linguistic landscape and ethnolinguistic vitality: An empirical study," *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 16, no. 1 (1997): 23–49.

² Durk Gorter, ed. *Linguistic Landscape: A New Approach to Multilingualism* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2006).

³ Durk Gorter, "Further Possibilities for Linguistic Landscape Research," in *Linguistic Landscape: A New Approach to Multilingualism*, ed. Durk Gorter, 81–89 (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2006); Máiréad Moriarty, "Languages in motion: Multilingualism and mobility in the linguistic landscape," *International Journal of Bilingualism* 18, no. 5 (2014): 457–63; Robert Blackwood and Deirdre A. Dunlevy, eds. *Multilingualism in Public Spaces: Empowering and Transforming Communities* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).

⁴ Elana Shohamy and Durk Gorter, "Introduction," in *Linguistic Landscape: Expanding the Scenery*, ed. Elana Shohamy and Durk Gorter, 1–10 (New York: Routledge, 2009); Dejan Ivković, "Pragmatics meets ideology: Digraphia and non-standard orthographic practices in Serbian online news forums," *Journal of Language and Politics* 12, no. 3 (2013): 335–56; Steven L. Thorne and Dejan Ivković, "Multilingual Eurovision meets plurilingual YouTube," *Dialogue in Multilingual and Multimodal Communities* 27 (2015): 167–92. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ds.27.06tho> (accessed August 15, 2022).

how ruling elites maintain their advantages in power relations by controlling the general discourse. In Neustupný's words, "the emphasis [is] on helping the dominated, [and] on reversing the balance of power in the outside world."⁵ Foucault is one of the first scholars to discuss "naked power" in discourse,⁶ specifically by investigating how the production of discourse is controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed through a certain number of procedures.⁷ Bourdieu later clarified the relationship between language and power by asserting that "the relations of linguistic exchanges are also relations of symbolic power in which the power relations between speakers and their respective groups are actualized."⁸ These relations are further revealed through critical discourse analysis, which conceptualizes language as a form of social practice that reproduces social structures; this unavoidably involves power relations, thereby incorporating power "in" and "behind" discourse.⁹ It is now a common assumption in the social sciences that discourse not only reflects but also shapes social reality, including patterns of power in interpersonal relations.¹⁰

The field of linguistic research places a great deal of emphasis on power relations.¹¹ This particular focus was mainly influenced by postmodernism and the analytical techniques found in critical discourse analysis. Many researchers have used these concepts to expose the power structures influencing the nature of linguistic choices offered in public spaces. By comparing the locations, sizes, and frequencies at which different languages appear, some early investigations have found connections between linguistic coexistence patterns and ethnic patterns.¹² Meanwhile, others have elucidated the growth and decline of competing international languages¹³ and demonstrated the existence of various power games be-

⁵ Jiří V. Neustupný, "Language and Power into the 21st Century." Paper presented at Language and Empowerment, Petaling Jaya Hilton, Kuala Lumpur, 2002. <http://languagemanagement.ff.cuni.cz/bibliography> (accessed August 17, 2022).

⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2005).

⁷ Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," in *Language and Politics*, ed. Michael Shapiro, 108–38 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984).

⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (London: Polity Press, 1991).

⁹ Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (London: Longman, 1989).

¹⁰ Adam Jaworski and Annette Pritchard, eds. *Discourse, Communication, and Tourism*. Vol. 5. Clevedon: Channel View Publications, 2005.

¹¹ Schulze, Rainer and Hanna Pishwa, eds. *The Exercise of Power in Communication: Devices, Reception and Reaction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).

¹² Eliezer Ben-Rafael, Elana Shohamy, Muhammad Hasan Amara, and Nira Trumper-Hecht, "Linguistic landscape as symbolic construction of the public space: The case of Israel," *International Journal of Multilingualism* 3, no. 1 (2006): 7–30.

¹³ Thom Huebner, "Bangkok's linguistic landscapes: Environmental print, codemixing and language change," *International Journal of Multilingualism* 3, no. 1 (2006): 31–51.

tween minority and majority linguistic groups,¹⁴ and private institutions and governments.¹⁵ Indeed, studies that read physical urban space as text have convincingly shown that linguistic landscape configurations are “explainable in terms of power relations between dominant and subordinate groups.”¹⁶ Meanwhile, the concept of the virtual linguistic landscape was proposed to capture the power relations behind the coexisting language choices and multilingual interactions in the cyberspace community. It is believed that the presence of different languages and their interaction in virtual space reflects analogous power relations in the tangible world, since the digital world is conceptually grounded in the physical world.¹⁷ From a semiotic perspective, all linguistic systems, whether in the physical or digital world, operate as systems of social positioning and power relationships.¹⁸ This justifies our investigation of power management in virtual space based on existing linguistic landscape research, which mainly focuses on data retrieved from the real world. By examining the negotiations between the makers and readers of public virtual signs, this study investigates the dynamic mechanisms behind the interactions between sign makers and readers while clarifying the process of power actualization in such interactions.

Introducing “interest” and “norm” via Language Management Theory

Language Management Theory (LMT) may provide a robust framework for analyzing power relations in language usage, including those between sign makers and target audiences in public spaces.¹⁹ LMT presumes that the linguistic behaviors of all people are influenced by “interests.”²⁰ Neustupný, a co-founder of LMT, defined “interest” as the aspiration to achieve a state of affairs that

¹⁴ Jasone Cenoz and Durk Gorter, “Linguistic landscape and minority languages,” *International Journal of Multilingualism* 3, no. 1 (2006): 67–80.

¹⁵ Peter Backhaus, “Multilingualism in Tokyo: A look into the linguistic landscape,” *International Journal of Multilingualism* 3, no. 1 (2006): 52–66.

¹⁶ Durk Gorter, “Introduction: The study of the linguistic landscape as a new approach to multilingualism,” *International Journal of Multilingualism* 3, no. 1 (2006b): 1–6.

¹⁷ Dejan Ivkovic and Heather Lotherington, “Multilingualism in cyberspace: Conceptualising the virtual linguistic landscape,” *International Journal of Multilingualism* 6, no. 1 (2009): 17–36.

¹⁸ Ron Scollon and Suzie Wong Scollon, *Discourses in Place: Language in the Material World* (London: Routledge, 2003).

¹⁹ Marián Sloboda, “Demarcating the Space for Multilingualism: On the Workings of Ethnic Interests in a ‘Civic Nation’,” in *Working Papers in Language Management*, 4 (2020). Available at <http://languagemanagement.ff.cuni.cz/bibliography> (accessed August 15, 2022); for an overview of the theory see Jiří Nekvapil, “Language Management Theory As One Approach in Language Policy and Planning,” *Current Issues in Language Planning* 17, no. 1 (2016): 11–22.

²⁰ Björn H. Jernudd and Jiří V. Neustupný, “Language Planning: For Whom?” in *Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Language Planning*, ed. Lorne Laforge, 69–84 (Québec: Les Presses de L’Université Laval, 1987).

is favorable to the subject.²¹ These interests are actualized through language-specific “norms” that are favorable to speakers. In LMT, norms are generally defined as linguistic rules that speakers deem correct for use in particular communicative situations.²² Here, rules include the established choices of communicative language/languages as well as the relevant phonological, grammatical, and pragmatic components.²³

LMT closely connects power with interests. Power operates on interests and is, in fact, defined as the capacity to implement them.²⁴ As the LMT framework posits that interests are realized through norms, power can also be seen as the capacity to implement norms that are favorable to individual interests. As a rule, participants involved in the same interaction do not necessarily possess identical power.²⁵ In LMT, the competition to establish norms does not refer to a struggle in which there are correct and incorrect viewpoints; rather, it is simply an oppositional circumstance in which competing ideas are juxtaposed.²⁶ Thus, in the interactive context, negotiations on norm selection equate to bargaining over the distribution of power; consequently, the results usually swing in favor of one group’s interests.²⁷

Researchers can use the LMT concepts of interests and norms to investigate the mechanism of power negotiation between sign makers and their target audiences. Here, the process of power negotiation is evident when scrutinizing competitions in which corresponding norms are articulated by interactive parties who are pursuing different interests.

Interests and norms in language choices within Language Management Theory

Often, there is a lack of negotiation when web makers decide which language will be offered through websites, as they can make unilateral decisions without consulting web visitors. However, the LMT approach can reveal the driving forces behind these decisions by targeting the corresponding carriers of interests

²¹ Neustupný, “Language and Power,” 3.

²² Jiří V. Neustupný, “Language Norms in Australian-Japanese Contact Situations,” in *Australia, Meeting Place of Languages*, ed. Michael G. Clyne, 161–70 (Canberra: Pacific Linguistics, 1985).

²³ Neustupný, “Language Norms”; Neustupný, “Language and Power,” 3.

²⁴ Neustupný, “Language and Power,” 3.

²⁵ Jiří V. Neustupný, “Current Issues in Japanese-Foreign Contact Situations.” In *Kyoto Conference on Japanese Studies 1994, Vol. II*, 208–16. Kyoto: International Research Center for Japanese Studies, 1996. Available at <http://language-management.ff.cuni.cz/bibliography> (accessed August 15, 2022).

²⁶ Jernudd and Neustupný, “Language Planning,” 74–75.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 78–80.

(i. e., chosen norms), which has led to some important questions: What interests can be pursued by web makers and/or visitors throughout this process? What supporting norms are available, if at all? For both sides, what interests/norms are satisfied or sacrificed through the outcome?

When defining “interest,” Neustupný used the plural forms of “interests” and “aspirations,” thereby suggesting that “interests” are multiple dynamic complexes rather than single static entities.²⁸ Furthermore, Jernudd and Neustupný proposed a dichotomy of linguistic and non-linguistic interests;²⁹ here, the linguistic component is related to communicative needs, while the non-linguistic component is related to symbolic values. It may be assumed that this dichotomy applies to all forms of communication, including those in the digital world. In the context of this study, communication includes the publishing and viewing of webpages, with web makers and web visitors being the relevant interlocutors. For any specific case, the configuration of interests between interlocutors is both dependent on the context and usually complex. In fact, both individuals and organizations could be pursuing multiple goals in any given situation and be forced to accept trade-offs between two or more conflicting objectives.³⁰ With a closer examination, more dimensions of interests can be identified: since both communicative and symbolic interests here are mainly non-material, a more materially oriented dimension of interests may include an analysis of the pecuniary dimension of interest. However, to avoid unnecessary complexity, we can temporarily start with the simplified dichotomy of communicative and symbolic interests. Pecuniary interests are discussed later in the paper. In our case of language choice for websites, we assume that for both the web makers and web visitors, the main communicative interest lies in delivering and receiving information, while the symbolic interest lies in the appeal to conform to a desired identification.

Which norms (i.e., available language choices) can facilitate the materialization of these respective interests? When a text can be put in multiple codes (language choices or orthographies) there is always a system of preference that reflects particular ideological positions.³¹ In our case, which language choices favor the web makers and web visitors within the constraints of virtual communication? When discussing the language choices used in public signage, Spolsky and Cooper proposed the following three prescriptive norms.³²

²⁸ Neustupný, “Language and Power,” 3.

²⁹ Jernudd and Neustupný, “Language Planning,” 76–77.

³⁰ Kalyanmoy Deb, “Multi-Objective Optimization,” in *Search Methodologies*, ed. Edmund K. Burke and Graham Kendall, 403–49 (Boston: Springer, 2014).

³¹ Scollon and Scollon. *Discourses in Place*, 120–22.

³² Bernard Spolsky and Robert L. Cooper, *The Languages of Jerusalem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

- (1) Write in the language the sign maker knows.
- (2) Write in the language the intended reader knows.
- (3) Write in the language with which the sign maker identifies.

These three norms were supposedly formulated based on the two basic functions of language, including the instrumental and symbolic. The first two norms fulfill the instrumental function of communication, while the third fulfills the symbolic function.³³ In Spolsky's analysis of signage in bilingual or multilingual contexts, he presumed that outdoor signs, such as advertisements, were primarily informative;³⁴ in addition to the languages known by the sign makers themselves, they would also choose the languages of their desired readers to fulfill communicative needs. However, Spolsky made this assertion based on data from Jerusalem, where elements of politics and sociality are often contested.³⁵ Therefore, discussions about a fourth possibility may have been precluded—that is, to write in the language with which the intended readers identify, even though it might overlap with the language known by the sign readers.

While the instrumental function for both interlocutors in any exchange of information is apparent, the mechanism behind the management of symbolic function is a more complicated issue.³⁶ Goffman's work on "self-presentation"³⁷ and Butler's work on "performativity"³⁸ both confirm that by using discourse targeting specific audiences, the interlocutors are able to construct and project desirable identities in the process of communication. However, how or whether the interlocutor can accommodate the symbolic inclination of the other side in communication is a less explored issue. Research within the framework of LMT reveals that in interpersonal interactions, the interlocutor with more power can decide what language is to be used and that the one who uses his or her own language usually possesses more power.³⁹ However, whether and how the interlocutors offer to accommodate the needs of the other side are not clear. In multilingual contexts of outdoor signage usage, how the use of additional languages can accommodate the symbolic needs of readers also deserves more

³³ Rodrigue and Bourhis, "Linguistic landscape"; Shohamy and Gorter, "Introduction."

³⁴ Spolsky, Bernard, "Prolegomena to a Sociolinguistic Theory of Public Signage," in *Linguistic Landscape: Expanding the Scenery*, ed. Elana Shohamy and Durk Gorter, 25–39 (New York: Routledge, 2009).

³⁵ Spolsky, "Prolegomena."

³⁶ On management of functions see Jiří V. Neustupný and Jiří Nekvapil, "Language Management in the Czech Republic," *Current Issues in Language Planning* 4, no. 3 & 4 (2003): 181–366.

³⁷ Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Books, 1959.

³⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

³⁹ Neustupný, "Language and Power."

attention. As Huebner acknowledged, code mixing found in linguistic landscapes deserves more detailed investigation than has been the case to date.⁴⁰ The reason for this unbalance might be that academia tends to interpret signage as an identity of discourse producers—sign makers in our case—that is primarily provided for others to see and respond to.⁴¹ The investigation into the use of the other side's language in communication is of particular significance in an international business context, where equality and mutual respect (even over-respect) are valued. In the scenario of online websites, although English often serves as the de facto common language, many lesser-used languages are offered simultaneously. In other words, the languages the sign readers know and identify with are usually present in parallel (or overlap) and thus are worth our attention.

As the instrumental-symbolic dichotomy applied in sign making is completely compatible with the communicative-symbolic values previously proposed by Jernudd and Neustupný, this study integrates the existing models in the current literature.⁴² Thus, when deciding which languages to offer on a website, web makers have four options/norms that correspond to their communicative and/or symbolic interests (see Tab. 1).

Tab. 1 Language options for investigated websites.

	Web maker's language	Web visitor's language
Communicative interests	Lm-k: The language the web maker knows	Lv-k: The language the web visitor knows
Symbolic interests	Lm-i: The language the web maker identifies with	Lv-i: The language the web visitor identifies with

Notes: L—language; m—maker; v—visitor; k—know; i—identify with.

As shown above (see Table 1), all four options (Lm-k, Lm-i, Lv-k, and Lv-i) can fulfill different possible interests held by the web maker. Lm-k is undoubtedly their primary tool of communication, while Lm-i (in most cases identical with Lm-k) may claim sovereignty or authority over a particular territory. Lv-k is also vital for fulfilling the communicative needs of the web maker, because the website is not accessible to visitors without an understandable language.

⁴⁰ Huebner, "Bangkok's linguistic landscapes."

⁴¹ Scollon and Scollon, *Discourses in Place*, 153–86.

⁴² Jernudd and Neustupný, "Language Planning," 76–77.

Lv-i may also be symbolically valuable for the web makers in projecting images of openness. However, the interests of web visitors rest solely on Lv-k and Lv-i. Specifically, Lv-k is vital for obtaining desired information, while Lv-i may instill the feeling that they are given respect. Lv-k and Lv-i can overlap if the visitors identify with the language they know.

However, few websites provide all four language types for all visitors. Indeed, it would be very difficult to provide categorical translations for all visitors, especially in a multilingual context in which individuals may have one of many linguistic backgrounds. As such, the inclusion or exclusion of Lv-k and Lv-i directly reflects the interests satisfied or discarded by the web maker, thereby revealing the power relations between themselves and different groups of visitors.

Research background and research questions

With a high degree of linguistic diversity, the cyberspace environment has drawn a great deal of attention from sociolinguists.⁴³ In China, where the total number of websites reached 5 million in 2018,⁴⁴ there is a unique and persistent cyberspace linguistic ecology, in which more languages are used in the process of “informatization.”⁴⁵ In fact, China’s *Thirteenth Five-Year Plan on National Informatization* (2016–2020) encourages local governments to improve both inward governance and outward publicity through informatization.⁴⁶ This development has coincided with the advancement of China’s integration into the global economy. China claimed that the national “Internet Plus” strategy (proposed by China’s premier Li Keqiang/李克强 in 2015) was meant to be open to the world, to connect international investors with Chinese industries.⁴⁷ While the provision of websites offering foreign-language versions can be seen as the localized implementation of national strategies in this new era, cyberspace is also a relatively new domain of management for the Chinese government, as it is in other parts of the world. In this context, there are very few official regulations

⁴³ Brenda Danet and Susan C. Herring, eds. *The Multilingual Internet: Language, Culture, and Communication Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴⁴ ISOC (Internet Society of China). *Zhongguo Hulanwang Fazhan Baogao 2019* [China Statistical Report on Internet Development 2019]. Beijing: ISOC, 2019. https://www.isc.org.cn/resource/editor/attached/file/20190711/20190711142249_27113.pdf (accessed September 3, 2022).

⁴⁵ Shi, Chunhong. “Wangluo Yuyan de Yuyan Jiazhi he Yuyanxue Jiazhi” [Web language as a language variety and a linguistic issue]. *Applied Linguistics* 20, no. 3 (2010): 70–80.

⁴⁶ SCOC (State Council of P.R. China). *Shisanwu Guojia Xinxihua Guihua* [Thirteenth Five-Year Plan on National Informatization], 2016. http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2016-12/27/content_5153411.htm (accessed August 22, 2022).

⁴⁷ See http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-06/26/content_2884664.htm (accessed August 30, 2022).

concerning the language choices offered by websites. In 2014, the State Council issued a statement advocating for stronger construction of government websites, thereby encouraging international language versions; however, this is not compulsory.⁴⁸ Consequently, local governments are allowed to make independent decisions when creating international language versions of their websites and do not have to consult with the so-called higher-level “top” regulator.⁴⁹

In this study, language choice was set as an entry point for investigating power relations in areas of online interaction. Provincial government websites emerged as ideal subjects of observation for two reasons. First, provincial governments belong to high-level administrators, who usually follow strict procedures related to collective decision-making, with only a low possibility of individual interference; this ensures that language choices reflect official government attitudes. Second, provincial governments have higher budgets for publicity than subordinate governments, which enables them to better accomplish their communicative needs than lower authorities.⁵⁰ Following the LMT framework, this study analyzed the power elements behind these language choices based on the four following sub-questions.

- (1) What languages/norms are selected or excluded by Chinese provincial governments?
- (2) What interests are satisfied or discarded for both Chinese provincial governments and their international visitors during the language-selection process?
- (3) What power relations between Chinese provincial governments and their international target visitors are reflected by these schemes?
- (4) What attitudes toward international communication are reflected by the relevant power distribution?

⁴⁸ SCOC (State Council of P.R. China). “Guanyu Jiaqiang Zhengfu Wangzhan Xinxi Neirong Jian-she de Yijian” [Opinions on Strengthening the Content Construction of Government Websites], 2014. http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2014-12/01/content_9283.htm (accessed September 4, 2022).

⁴⁹ Spolsky, “Prolegomena,” 31.

⁵⁰ China’s administrative units are currently based on a three-tier system, dividing the nation into provinces, counties, and townships; the 22 provinces, five autonomous regions, and four centrally administered municipalities involved in this study are usually considered to enjoy the same high status and are accountable only to the central government (Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan are not included in this study because the management of official website languages in these three areas follows rules significantly different from those on the mainland).

Research design and survey results

This study surveyed the official websites of all 31 mainland provincial governments in China (i.e., 22 provinces, five autonomous regions, and four centrally administered municipalities). The primary data consisted of the language choices offered by provincial websites (first retrieved on July 1, 2018 and updated in January 2021). Our investigation showed that governments could choose from simplified Chinese (officially used on the Chinese mainland), traditional Chinese (mainly used in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan), English, multiple foreign languages, and ethnic minority languages. As this study focused on the power relations between Chinese local governments and international visitors, we did not consider the traditional Chinese or minority languages, though we mention their use occasionally in the paper. Based on their language choices, we then classified the websites into three types: Chinese, Chinese + English, and Chinese + English + multiple languages (see Tab. 2).

Tab. 2 Language choices of Chinese provincial government websites.

Language choice	Number of provinces	Provincial governments
Only Chinese	11	Tianjin, Shanxi, Henan, Guangdong, Yunnan, Liaoning, Heilongjiang, Inner Mongolia, Shandong, Qinghai, Tibet
Chinese + English	16	Beijing, Shanghai, Hebei, Fujian, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Hainan, Sichuan, Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, Chongqing, Guangxi, Anhui, Guizhou, Xinjiang
Chinese + English + multiple languages	4	Zhejiang (German, Japanese, and French), Jilin (Japanese, Korean, and Russian), Hunan (Japanese, French, and Korean), Hubei (French)

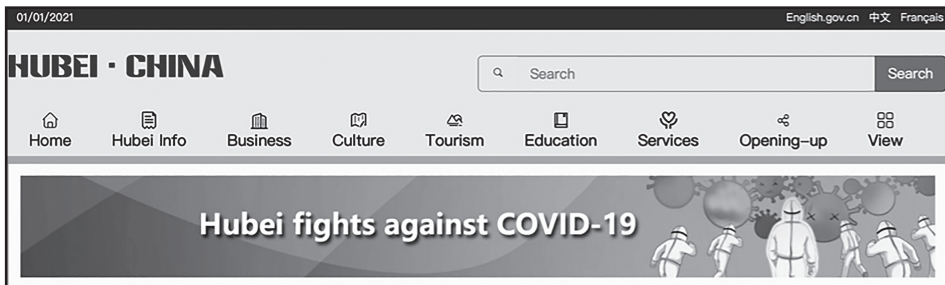
Most homepages of provincial government websites are visually similar to that of Hubei province, as shown in Figure 1. It is written in Chinese but provides links to English and French versions at the top right section of the banner. The main sections on the Chinese homepage include (from left to right): “Homepage,” “Provincial government,” “Governor’s top agenda,” “Information disclosure,” “One-stop services,” “Interactions and exchanges,” “New media,” and “Facts of Hubei.”

Fig. 1 The Chinese homepage for Hubei Province.



English versions normally consist of different sections and feature different layouts to those of their Chinese counterparts (see Fig. 2).

Fig. 2 The English homepage for Hubei Province.



In addition to the language choices, we briefly examined the web sections and update frequencies of the available English websites, thereby assessing the content and quality of the provided information.

For all twenty governments that provide international versions, nine types of information are usually presented. When multiple language versions are provided, they share the same layout of webpages, and in such cases, all versions were counted as one. The distribution is shown in Table 3.⁵¹ Most sections include only static pages that do not require frequent maintenance except “News.”

⁵¹ The information was collected in 2018. However, a few provinces initiated redesigns of their webpage layouts after that, and thus, the table might not fully reflect the status quo.

Tab. 3 Sections presented on international language version government websites.

Section types	Frequency	Section titles	Section content
News	17	News, Media	Selected major events of international significance; English versions usually have fewer entries than the Chinese ones.
Business	16	Business, Investment	Investment landscape and opportunities in the province.
Tourism	16	Tourism, Travel	Tourist attractions, food, and related services.
Government offices	12	Government	Government leaders, departments, offices, and important regulations.
Province facts	12	About XX	Geography, population, infrastructure, etc.; some introduce the current administration system.
Life	9	Living in XX	Transportation, hospitals, shopping, visas, and residence permits, etc.
Education	6	Study in XX, Education	Universities, scholarships, living expenses, etc.
Online services	5	Services	Government services mostly relevant for foreigners, which may overlap with other sections.
Culture	3	Culture of XX	Unique cultural customs or heritage.

* XX in this table refers to the name of a province

We then conducted follow-up interviews with website personnel and international visitors about the language choices of the sites. We asked the relevant government departments a series of basic questions: (1) Why does the government only provide Chinese versions of their website, and not any international languages? (for websites with Chinese-only versions); (2) Why does the government provide an English version along with the Chinese version of the website? Who are the target visitors for the English version and what are the expected effects? (for websites with Chinese and English versions); and (3) Why does the government provide multiple language versions along with the Chinese version of the website? Who are the target visitors of the international language versions and what are the expected effects? (for websites with multiple languages). These questions were sent to the relevant departments of all

31 websites through emails or posts on their “Q&A” section. However, personnel from only 11 websites responded (Guangdong, Yunnan, Tibet, Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Anhui, Guizhou, Zhejiang, and Hunan). Websites featuring all three types of language choices in our study were covered.

Meanwhile, we selected some expats (following the process explained below) as representatives of overseas visitors to examine their perceptions of the language choices. A major limitation is the virtual impossibility for the researchers of locating the real visitors of these provincial government websites. The visitors can be from anywhere in the world, come with a variety of purposes, and leave no trace on the websites for the researchers to track. The potential visitors (expats, businesspeople, tourists, international students, etc.) may have obtained information through other channels, including embassies, economic offices, social media groups, or other specific websites. Our analysis through “Similarweb”⁵² showed that all websites, even those without an international language version, have some proportion of visitors located outside China (Shanghai had the highest proportion at 8.75 percent while Fujian had the lowest at 2.67 percent). In some cases, the visitors might have reached the website personnel for further communication but the researchers had no access to their contact information and such. The solution we reached was to give some non-Chinese speakers a task that turned them into potential visitors of these websites. The expats involved in this study were eight international language teachers working in a Chinese university (two from the US, one from the UK, one from France, two from South Korea, and two from Japan). They were entrusted with a task—to find out if certain provinces provided scholarships for international students—and it was recommended that they find the information through the websites provided. The researchers then collected the answers from the expats and casually asked about their thoughts on the language choices of these websites. The questions for the expats were simple: “How many language versions did you notice on the website you visited?” and “How do you like the language choices of the provincial governments?” The results are presented and discussed in the following sections.

This study suffers from some limitations. First, there was restricted access to the individuals who decided on the language choices used for the investigated government websites, which limited data availability. While 11 provinces replied to our inquiries, there is a high possibility that the answers we received were written by low-level administrative officials and then approved by the relevant department directors. If that were the case, the information might

⁵² “Similarweb” is a world-leading platform that provides web analytics services. It can extract the daily traffic information of any website and analyze the traffic by country.

not reflect the real intentions of high-level officials. Second, the links between language choice and attitudes toward international cooperation were sometimes not clear, which prevented us from presenting a crisper pattern. Third, insufficient attention was paid to the differences in web content among the existing language versions, which is also closely related to the power relations of the makers and the visitors. However, as in-depth discussion of web content might divert from our focus on language choices, we consider it better suited to future research.

A REFINED FRAMEWORK

Analyzing language choices: Language options offered by provincial governments

Only Chinese: Lm-k/Lm-i

China does not explicitly designate Chinese as the official or national language in any legal document. However, both the Constitution (1982, amended in 2018) and Law on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language (2000, the Language Law) emphasize that state and local governments should popularize Putonghua/普通话 (spoken) and standardized Chinese characters (written) at various levels.⁵³ In 1999, the Ministry of Human Resources, Ministry of Education, and State Language Council jointly issued a Notice stipulating that all civil servants born after January 1, 1954 must pass the Level Three test for standard spoken Chinese.⁵⁴ The Language Law (2000) further stipulated that all state organs must use standard Chinese during official or public activities.

The Law on Regional National Autonomy (1984) gives local governments in the five ethnic autonomous regions (Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Xizang (Tibet), and Xinjiang) the right to use ethnic languages as primary working languages in conjunction with the standard language. However, standardized spoken and written Chinese is still the common language used in all provin-

⁵³ MOE (Ministry of Education). *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Guojia Tongyong Yuyan Wenzhi Fa* [Law on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language of the People's Republic of China], 2000. http://www.gov.cn/ziliao/flfg/2005-08/31/content_27920.htm (accessed August 30, 2022).

⁵⁴ SCOC (State Council of P. R. China). "Guanyu Kaizhan Guojia Gongwuyuan Putonghua Peixun de Tongzhi" [Notice on Implementing Training of Standard Spoken Chinese for State Civil Servants], 1999. http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2014-12/01/content_9283.htm (accessed September 1, 2022).

cial governments and serves as the de facto official language in the context of Chinese administration. As such, one may reasonably deduce that Chinese is the language that all Chinese provincial governments know and identify with; indeed, our survey showed that all governments provided Chinese versions of their websites (Lm-k/Lm-i).

Chinese + English: Lm-k/Lm-i + Lv-k (Lm-i, Lv-i)

The symbolic values that the language of English carries with it are very complicated. English has long been accepted as the undisputed lingua franca in the world of global business,⁵⁵ such that it is considered “the most widely used lingua franca in international business transactions.”⁵⁶ In our case, English is first used as the language that the web visitors know. Except for rare cases in which the visitors also know Chinese, we assume that most foreign visitors to Chinese provincial government websites expect to encounter an English webpage and thus, possess some knowledge of English. For provincial governments that use Chinese as their native language, English should therefore be regarded as the language offered to web visitors. In this regard, English is a language that is acquired in the classroom and/or work settings in countries where it is not the native language. As such, English is mainly used by these visitors as a tool for meeting their communicative needs and is not directly related to symbolic values.

Meanwhile, in areas outside the inner circle of English-speaking countries,⁵⁷ English is endowed with the qualities of modernity, advancement, openness, and other symbolic values.⁵⁸ A previous investigation in Tokyo revealed that English was found on 97.7 percent of outdoor signs, which outnumbered the

⁵⁵ David Crystal, *English as a Global Language* (2nd ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Susanne Tietze, “Spreading the management gospel—In English,” *Language and Intercultural Communication* 4, no. 3 (2004): 175–89; Ian MacKenzie, *English, as a Lingua Franca: Theorizing and teaching English* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014); Thomas Ricento, *Language Policy and Political Economy: English in a Global Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁵⁶ Tamah Sherman and Jiří Nekvapil, “Sociolinguistic Perspectives on English in Business and Commerce,” in *English in Business and Commerce: Interactions and Policies*, ed. Tamah Sherman and Jiří Nekvapil, 1–16 (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2018b).

⁵⁷ Braj B Kachru, *The Other Tongue: English Across Cultures* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

⁵⁸ Ian Glenn, “University and literature in South Africa: Who produces symbolic value?” *Critical Arts*, 3, no. 2 (1984): 20–24; Seargeant, Philip. “The Symbolic Meaning of Visual English in the Social Landscape of Japan.” In *English in Japan in the Era of Globalization*, ed. Philip Seargeant, 187–204 (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); So Jin Park and Nancy Abelman, “Class and cosmopolitan striving: Mothers’ management of English education in South Korea,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 77, no. 4 (2004): 645–72.

percentage of signs featuring Japanese at only 72.1 percent.⁵⁹ In this context, the popularity of English was interpreted as a symbolic appeal from Japanese signwriters to join the English language community and associate with many of their attached values (American Western culture, internationalization).⁶⁰ Therefore, the web makers may also have found some degree of identification in the English language.

Lastly, the huge population of English speakers (especially native speakers) will find their symbolic needs satisfied with the use of English. If Crystal is right, there should be over 2 billion people on the Earth using English as a native language, additional language,⁶¹ (associate) state official language, or second language, of whom 370 million are first-language speakers.⁶² Norton proposed that language learners are constantly engaged in a continuous process of identity construction every time they speak.⁶³ It is discovered that for patriotic reasons, some foreign-language learners may reject the languages imposed on them or choose to construct oppositional identities during the process of learning.⁶⁴ However, others may create an alternative new identity through the means of a foreign language and express a strong inclination to integrate and identify with the target linguistic and cultural norms.⁶⁵ Thus, while the first-language speakers are presumed to identify with English, the remaining 1.62 billion world English users may find a concordant or oppositional identity in the use of English. To avoid excessive complexity in the analysis, we acknowledge the identification of the native English visitors but we ignore the possible identification of those whose second language is English.

Chinese + English + multiple languages: Lm-k/Lm-i + Lv-k + Lv-i

While English is widely used during international business encounters, this has not resulted in monolingual interactions.⁶⁶ Rather, linguistic diversity remains

⁵⁹ Backhaus, "Multilingualism in Tokyo."

⁶⁰ Ibid., 63.

⁶¹ Crystal, "English as a Global Language."

⁶² Ethnologue, "What are the top 200 most spoken languages?" *Ethnologue*. February 26, 2021. <https://www.ethnologue.com/guides/ethnologue200> (accessed September 3, 2022).

⁶³ Bonny Norton, "Language, identity, and the ownership of English," *TESOL quarterly* 31, no. 3 (1997): 409–29.

⁶⁴ Aneta Pavlenko, "'Language of the enemy': Foreign language education and national identity," *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 6, no. 5 (2003): 313–31.

⁶⁵ Seyyed Hatam Tamimi Sa'd, "Foreign language learning and identity reconstruction: Learners' understanding of the intersections of the self, the other and power," *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal* 7, no. 4 (2017): 13–36.

⁶⁶ Rebecca Piekkari, Denice Welch, and Lawrence S. Welch, *Language in International Business: The Multilingual Reality of Global Business Expansion* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2014).

a reality in the international business world, with many languages other than English used to communicate.⁶⁷ Where multiple language versions of websites are provided, visitors from countries where the relevant languages are used as official or national languages find that some of their symbolic interests are met, because they identify with these languages. Balanced bilingual or trilingual visitors may find identification in more than one language if no oppositional identification has been developed during the process of acquiring the additional languages. In such cases, our framework still applies since the differentiation between the language one knows and the language one identifies with still exists.

Corresponding elements between norms and interests

Different combinations of language choices correspond to different potential interests for both the web makers and visitors. We analyzed these types of interests based on data obtained from online interviews conducted via eleven of these websites. Our focus was on the web makers, with a more limited analysis of web visitors. The integrated model suggests that the language choices of provincial governments may refer to different communicative and symbolic interests (see Table 4).

Tab. 4 Language options for Chinese provincial websites.

	Web maker's language	Web visitor's language
Communicative interests	Lm-k: Chinese	Lv-k: English
Symbolic interests	Lm-i: Chinese	Lv-i: English + multiple languages

Notes: L—language; m—maker; v—visitor; k—know; i—identify with

Chinese-only sites

As the web makers know and identify with Chinese, such usage satisfies both their communicative and symbolic interests. In 2014, the State Council of China issued a document titled “Opinions on Strengthening the Content Constructi-

⁶⁷ Tamah Sherman and Jiří Nekvapil, eds. *English in Business and Commerce: Interactions and Policies* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2018).

on of Government Websites,”⁶⁸ which stipulated that the four main functions of government websites included “publicizing major government movements in timely manner, interpreting government policies into accessible forms, responding to hot social issues, and enhancing interaction with the citizens.” This indicates that government websites are primarily interested in providing services for domestic visitors, who mainly use Chinese (minority language versions of these websites are provided in accordance with regulations prescribed elsewhere). Data show that 91.25 percent to 97.33 percent of all visitors are domestic visitors.⁶⁹ Thus, Chinese alone can fulfill most communicative needs, particularly for domestic visitors, who constitute the vast majority. International communication, however, is only possible when visitors can read Chinese. Language has long been seen as an important tool for setting boundaries among different communities.⁷⁰ Language can be used within a particular territory to present the identity of that community.⁷¹ In linguistic landscape studies, signs in a particular language are also believed to “mark the territory” for a language community.⁷² Thus, the exclusive presence of Chinese on government websites here performs the symbolic function of claiming sovereignty or showing nationalism in this virtual context where no foreign needs are being accommodated. Such exclusiveness presents to the visitors the status of Chinese in comparison to other languages, which reflects a symbolic power relation between Chinese and other language communities.⁷³ Chinese plays an important role in China’s cause of state-building as well as nation-building⁷⁴ as it undisputedly stands at the pinnacle of the metalinguistic hierarchy in China.⁷⁵ Ivkovic and Lotherington came to similar conclusions in relation to the Russian language used on Russian governmental websites.⁷⁶ For international visitors, the exclusive usage of the web maker’s language means that neither the communicative nor the symbolic interests are being addressed.

⁶⁸ SCOC (State Council of P. R. China). “Guanyu Jiaqiang Zhengfu Wangzhan Xinxi Neirong Jianshe de Yijian”

⁶⁹ Data collected from Similarweb on May 14, 2021.

⁷⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

⁷¹ Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

⁷² Backhaus, “Multilingualism in Tokyo.”

⁷³ Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*.

⁷⁴ Minglang Zhou and Heidi A. Ross. “Introduction: The context of the theory and practice of China’s language policy,” in *Language Policy in the People’s Republic of China*, 1–18 (Springer, Dordrecht, 2004).

⁷⁵ Arienne M. Dwyer, “The texture of tongues: Languages and power in China,” *Nationalism and ethnic politics* 4, no. 1–2 (1998): 68–85.

⁷⁶ Ivkovic and Lotherington. “Multilingualism in cyberspace.”

Chinese + English sites

When English is included in the scheme, the situation changes for both the web makers and visitors. For the web makers, this fulfills extra communicative functions by enabling communication with people from other countries, serving the bridging function in Neustupný and Nekvapil's words.⁷⁷ In a world where English is the common language, English versions of webpages can deliver necessary information to almost all target readers. In our investigation, Beijing, Jiangsu, Anhui, and Jiangxi all expressed similar purposes in which the main function of the English versions of their websites was to provide information to foreigners living in those respective areas as well as those located outside China who are interested in visiting their province.

The Chinese web makers also hold symbolic interests that are expected. Beijing claims that an English website benefits its mission of establishing the city as a hub for international communication. Anhui believes that their English website will grow into an "Anhui platform" that spreads "Anhui stories" to the world, thereby encouraging an international group of "friends of Anhui." Jiangxi also hopes to improve its international influence through a well-designed website. For Chinese provincial governments, English usage may project an image of openness and internationalization. Here, English is not only the language the web maker identifies with but also the language it hopes to be identified with, particularly as a token of internationalization. As our model shows, web makers can fulfill certain symbolic interests by using Lv-k in situations in which it entails certain symbolic values.

For international visitors, English usage may fulfill communicative needs for all and symbolic interests for those who use it as a native language. The majority of visitors who know English as a working language can obtain the information they need and also leave messages in the hope of receiving a reply. Speakers whose first language is English (e.g., our interviewed expats from the US and UK) expressed appreciation for the thoughtfulness and the respect they perceived from these local governments compared with the governments that did not provide English websites. However, individuals from areas where English is not considered native (e.g., France) did not share this sentiment, which proves that a neutral or even oppositional identity may have formed among English users.

⁷⁷ Neustupný and Nekvapil, "Language Management in the Czech Republic," 320.

Chinese + English + multiple languages

If the government increases its efforts to provide multiple language versions of websites, then the scheme of interest changes accordingly. For web makers operating in a context where they presume that English is known by all international businesspersons, using both Chinese and English enables them to reach almost all potential target visitors. Any additional (other) language version can arguably reach only a small extra proportion of the global business population; that is, those who do not speak English. Thus, the symbolic values are worth paying more attention to. In our interview, Zhejiang province proudly announced that it conducted more international trade and received more international visitors than many other provinces and that the multilingual websites were created to help “foreign friends” know and understand Zhejiang better. It is reasonable to assume that the image of openness, inclusiveness, and thoughtfulness was directly projected by the multilingual website owing to the inclusion of languages spoken by smaller populations; our interview with expats shows that this message is received even by those who do not speak those languages. Web visitors who use the other-than-English languages provided usually find that both their communicative and symbolic needs are fulfilled, as they can easily obtain information using their own languages, which was a “pleasant surprise” for three of the interviewees.

Power elements reflected in language options*Analysis via the communicative-symbolic framework*

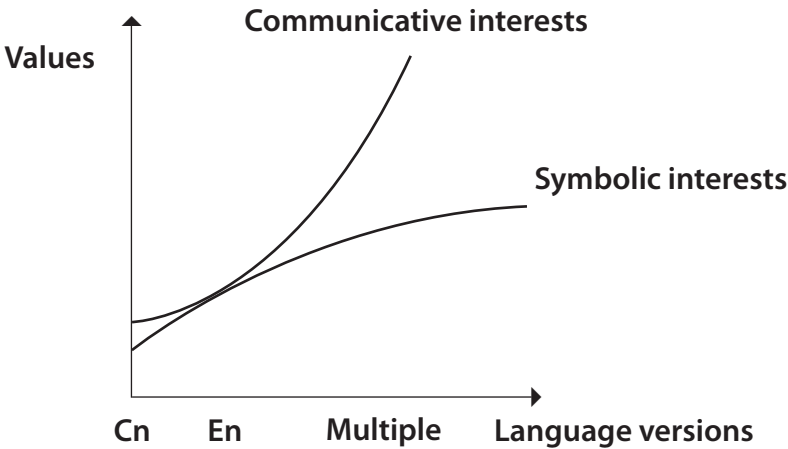
The communicative-symbolic framework provides us with a tool to examine the losses and gains of interest for both the web maker and international visitors. Within this framework, the party with the greater amount of satisfied communicative and symbolic interests also enjoys more power than others.

Regarding the web makers, our analysis showed that a larger number of language versions correlated with more interest. However, those who only provided Chinese websites could fulfill communicative needs overwhelmingly with domestic visitors while projecting symbolic interests of sovereignty to all visitors. If English was included in the scheme, then the government could communicate with international visitors while achieving symbolic images of openness and international acceptance. When more language versions were considered, governments could communicate with larger target groups, thus increasing the possibility of gaining the goodwill of individuals from a more

extensive range of backgrounds. As shown in Figure 3, an increase in interest can be achieved by offering a greater number of language versions.

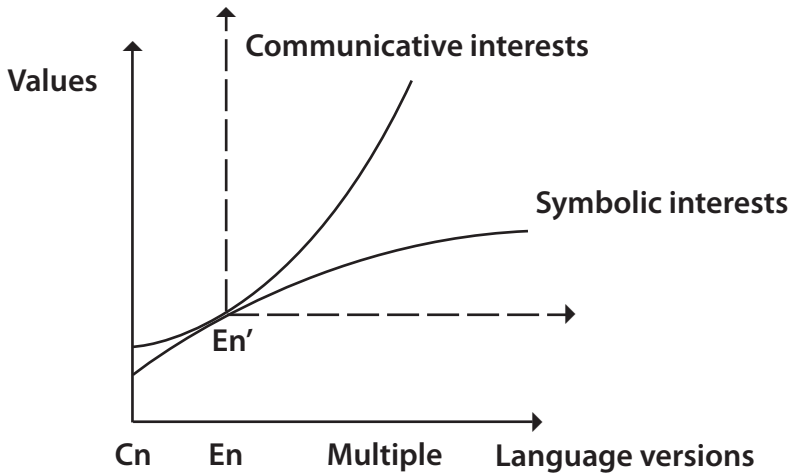
Here, the communicative interests ranked higher than symbolic ones as the primary goal of a website, which as, demonstrated by our research, is to deliver information to the targeted visitors. When more language versions were added to the scheme, communicative interests rose accordingly as the number of visitors that could be reached increased quickly. Symbolic interests rose along a more flattened curve as the image of openness improved significantly when the first international language was used on the website but was only improved slightly when more languages were added.

Fig. 3 Communicative and symbolic interests of the provincial governments.



Notably, we found a similar pattern for international visitors: a greater number of language versions was associated with the greater achievement of interests, although alternate versions begin with “En” where English versions are introduced. Figure 4 shows the expansion of interests. For speakers of a specific language other than English, the inclusion of this language would generate great convenience for communication as well as a remarkable amount of palpable respect. For the speakers whose languages are not used, more languages in addition to English may mean little to them.

Fig. 4 Communicative and symbolic interests of both the governments and international visitors.



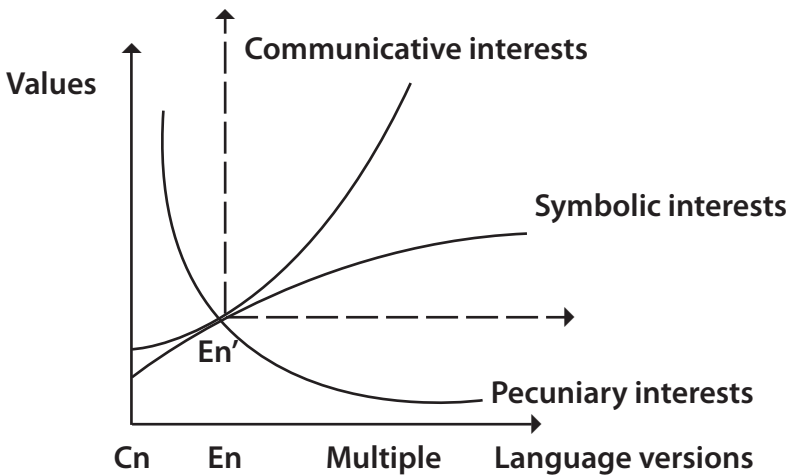
As clearly shown in Figure 4, governments can realize their interests by solely providing Chinese versions of their websites. However, this totally disregards the interests of an overwhelming majority of international visitors. However, the interests of web makers and visitors seemed to coincide in cases where English versions were included. In other words, more language versions are associated with greater amounts of mutual interest. This poses an important question: what prevents governments from implementing additional language versions?

Introducing pecuniary interests

It is possible that governments might not be able to provide multiple language versions of their websites owing to a new dimension of interest that has not previously been considered. The major difference between the language choices offered via outdoor signage and those found on government websites is that the latter often require extensive follow-up translations and other maintenance work. This burdens the web makers with additional costs that increase with each offered language version. The direct and/or indirect economic gains and losses involved in these language choices constitute a new dimension, which we refer to as pecuniary interests. This new form of interest develops in a different direction than that of communicative and symbolic interests; when more languages are introduced, pecuniary interests decrease (see Fig. 5). The multi-

lingualism-related pecuniary interests stay the highest when no international website is required, but they drop sharply when the first international language version (here, English) is made. From then on, such interests decline at a slower pace, since all extra versions share the same layout of webpages and more versions require only a translation of the text. When more language versions are included, such interests slowly approach zero. This may explain why provincial governments provide only limited instead of unlimited language versions.

Fig. 5 Pecuniary interests of the provincial governments.



We can now discuss the relative power positions of web makers and visitors. Provincial governments exercise unilateral power when deciding to construct Chinese-only versions of their websites. In this context, governments enjoy a dominant power position in the relationship with international visitors, whose interests are not considered at all. Meanwhile, governments that decide to include English versions lower their position to a more equal level by catering to the needs of international visitors through the sacrifice of some pecuniary interests. By including additional language versions, governments actively relinquish pecuniary interests in exchange for communicative and some symbolic interests. As such, the prioritization of communication with international visitors indicates a lower position of power for those governments compared to those who provide only a Chinese version.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Language choices and outward attitudes

It is possible to analyze governmental attitudes toward international communication by studying the pattern in which more language versions indicate lower power positions. This is because multilingual websites are not compulsory, so governments must willingly implement them. To facilitate our discussion of related attitudes, Figure 6 shows a geographical distribution map of these choices.

Fig. 6 Geographical distribution of provincial language choices.



The following subsections offer three strategies by which language choices are used by local governments, thus revealing different attitudes:

No foreign language options

Altogether, we found that 11 of the 31 investigated provincial governments chose not to implement foreign languages on their official websites, thus representing about one third of the total. This indicates that a significant proportion of local governments in China do not find it necessary to establish an official international image online. Geographically, most of these 11 governments

are found along land borders and landlocked districts to the north, west, and south (Heilongjiang, Liaoning, Inner Mongolia, Tibet, Yunnan, Shanxi, Henan, and Qinghai). It is somewhat understandable that these provinces would not offer international language versions of their websites, as there are relatively fewer opportunities and lesser needs to communicate in an international context. However, it was interesting to find that the coastal areas of Guangdong, Shandong, and Tianjin also did not offer international websites, as these three coastal regions are important economic hubs in Chinese international trade. In fact, in terms of the number of registered foreign invested enterprises in 2016, these locations ranked 1st, 6th, and 9th among all 31 provincial districts. In terms of imported/exported goods from foreign invested enterprises, they ranked 1st, 4th, and 8th in 2016.⁷⁸

Of the abovementioned 11 provinces, three, namely, Yunnan, Tibet, and Guangdong, replied to our research inquiries. When explaining the absence of international website versions, personnel from Yunnan and Tibet both referred to the “Opinions on Strengthening the Content Construction of Government Websites,”⁷⁹ in which only one item refers to this issue:

Foreign language versions of the website should be supported by professional and qualified staff, so the content update, language use, and respect of foreign cultures and preferences can be assured. ... Where the conditions are not ready, the foreign language version website can be suspended.

Specifically, personnel from Yunnan and Tibet claimed their governments were not yet capable of meeting the high standards set by the State Council owing to workforce shortages. Guangdong expressed similar concerns based on the conditions required to establish English versions of their website; once prepared, they plan to do so. However, it is difficult to accept the idea that a provincial government in China lacks the funds needed to create a multi-lingual website. It is plausible to presume that Guangdong province, which brings in yearly fiscal revenue of around 130 billion Yuan (about 19 billion USD), should have no problems funding such a website. In fact, six of the interviewed expats expressed surprise upon finding out Guangdong does not provide an English version. Other reasons that could explain the absence of

⁷⁸ See information released by the NBOSOC (National Bureau of Statistics of China). “GDP of China by Province in the last Ten Years,” 2021. <https://data.stats.gov.cn/easyquery.htm?cn=E0103> (accessed September 6, 2022).

⁷⁹ SCOC (State Council of P. R. China). “Guanyu Jiaqiang Zhengfu Wangzhan Xinxi Neirong Jianshe de Yijian.”

an English version could be inefficiency or dereliction of duty on the part of the public administration. However, we found it unlikely that a coastal hub serving as a primary economic engine of China and a window of China to the outside world would suffer from a bureaucracy worse than the other parts of the country. The best way to explain this absence of implementation might be a lack of willingness to lower their position when facing the outside world, or to tackle the obstacles within the system even if they do have the intention of making an English website.

We found a general pattern in which backland regions remained conservative toward the idea of international websites. This tendency was also reflected in the replies we received from the three abovementioned governments. In particular, the economically prosperous coastal province of Guangdong appeared to lack openness and international respect in its neglect of foreign languages. However, they did express the intention to establish an English version. Yunnan, as a portal that connects three Southeast Asian countries—Vietnam, Laos, and Myanmar—also confirmed that they are considering making foreign language versions. Tibet, however, merely explained why it had not done so.

Use of Chinese and English only

Altogether, 16 of the 31 provincial governments in China offered Chinese and English versions of their websites, representing about half of the total. Here, locations included political and economic centers, such as Beijing and Shanghai; main GDP contributors, such as Jiangsu and Sichuan; coastal/island provinces, such as Fujian and Hainan; inland provinces, such as Hebei, Jiangxi, and Anhui; and remote regions in the far west, such as Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, Guizhou, and Xinjiang. This wide variation does reflect a clear pattern, as these provinces represent almost all types of local regions in China. However, a closer examination reveals that the backland areas are seemingly more conservative. For a more detailed observation, we, focused on the “News” sections of some English websites on which update information regarding maintenance and costs is available. The data were retrieved in early 2018 and we calculated the total number of news articles and the number of days in which articles had been updated in the previous seven months (see Table 5).

Tab. 5 Update frequency of “News” sections on provincial websites in English.

	Total articles	Days with updates	Average interval (day)
Beijing	4280	214	1.0
Shanghai	1712	212	1.0
Guizhou	312	212	1.0
Anhui	355	139	1.5
Jiangxi	270	126	1.7
Sichuan	126	126	1.7
Hebei	231	105	2.0
Shaanxi	113	76	2.8
Hainan	81	51	4.2
Jiangsu	36	31	6.9
Fujian	30	25	8.6
Gansu	7	6	35.7
Xinjiang	0	0	214.0
Ningxia	N/A	N/A	N/A

Generally, regions in the middle and western parts of China were not as proficient with updating, with some producing unsatisfactory results. For example, Xinjiang did not update its news section during the seven months of the considered year, while Gansu only updated seven news articles over that period. Ningxia did not even offer a “News” section. Shaanxi managed to update their news every three days on average, which was very infrequent compared to Shanghai and Beijing, where dozens of pieces are released every day. In this regard, the western regions are barely informative from a news perspective.⁸⁰ In summary, this lack of updating shows that backland regions tend to ignore the needs of international visitors, even when simple English websites are provided.

Use of multiple languages

Altogether, only four of the 31 provinces (Zhejiang, Hubei, Hunan, and Jilin) offered multiple language versions of their websites, specifically covering French, Japanese, German, Russian, and Korean. Jilin might have chosen to include Rus-

⁸⁰ He, Shanhua 何山华. “Shengji Zhengfu Menhu Wangzhan Duoyu Fuwu Diaocha 省级政府门户网站多语服务调查” [Multilingual services on provincial government websites]. In *Language Situation in China*, ed. State Language Council, 94–98. Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2018.

sian, Korean, and Japanese in addition to English for both demographic and historical reasons, as it borders Russia and North Korea to the east and south while also being home to Russian and Korean ethnic minorities who have lived in China for centuries. Furthermore, the area itself was colonized by Japan from 1931 to 1945 (before and during World War II), and thus, some individuals still maintain social contacts and close connections with different linguistic communities.

Zhejiang, Hunan, and Hubei provided multilingual versions of their websites for other practical reasons. Zhejiang explicitly expressed that the main function of multilingual websites is to provide information about important policies and major events of the province for international visitors. The provision of multilingual versions in this region reflects that Zhejiang, as one of the wealthiest areas in China and home to the multinational technology giant Alibaba, is famous for its pioneering spirit in both technological and administrative innovation, especially in digital governance. Hunan and Hubei are adjacent provinces in middle China. As the Yangtze River flows between them, they are important port cities that serve as economic hubs for the middle and western parts of China. For all three of these provinces, active participation in the international economy explains the provision of multilingual websites to a large extent.

CONCLUSION

The language choices of official government websites work to shape the linguistic landscape in cyberspace. Here, linguistic strategies primarily involve interest-based decisions, reflecting the power positions of web makers in relation to international visitors while also reflecting their attitudes toward the idea of international communication as a whole. In the LMT framework, the concepts of interests and norms enable researchers to examine more closely both the sources of power and nature of attitudes behind these choices. However, our analysis showed that communicative and symbolic interests were not sufficient to explain the motivations behind these language choices alone. As such, we propose that pecuniary interests should also be considered. Specifically, we found that willingness to relinquish more pecuniary interests reflected both a lower position of power and a more open mindset toward international communication.

Although approximately half of all 31 provincial governments in China provided international language versions of their websites, we found that only a small number implemented regular updates for those versions. In general, governments operating in economically vibrant areas hold more open attitudes

toward international communication, while backland areas are more conservative when communicating with the outside world. There were some exceptions, such as Guangdong, Tianjin, and Shandong (three economically active coastal areas), which chose not to implement any international languages on their official websites. This may reflect a lack of openness and/or limited respect for outside areas, since pecuniary interests should not prohibit implementation owing to these areas' greater wealth.

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