

# On the economic importance of language

## Background

In 2018 the Dutch Language Union commissioned Maaïke Verrips ([De Taalstudio](#)), Dries Debackere ([De Taalsector](#)), and Ronnie Antonius ([LEFT Consultancy](#)) to conduct an exploration of the language sector in the Dutch language area.<sup>1</sup> Their report portrays the full scope of this sector, visualized as a central core with an outer ring. In the core, language is the entire product or service; in the outer ring, it forms part of a broader range of activities. The report also provides examples of language-related professions, businesses and organizations (see overleaf).

## Findings

The researchers studied national statistics to identify the many different economic sectors in which language-related products and services are created and supplied. These statistics reveal that the language sector is firmly established throughout the economy and offers many professional opportunities.

A survey conducted in the language sector reveals prevailing optimism about the future, with investment taking place and forecasts of growth in revenues and profits. At the same time, language professionals voice concerns about the sector's innovative capability, visibility, and appeal to the next generation.

Language professionals and companies welcome the increasing awareness of the sector's profile and see opportunities for greater cooperation and exchange. Not everyone is aware of the products and services other parties produce and provide, and some parties in the sector take up innovations faster than others.

## Recommendations

The researchers see a need for a model to calculate the economic and financial value of the language sector as a whole, similar to existing models for tourism and temporary employment, and indicate that the value of the language sector for society as a whole could be demonstrated in more concrete terms.

In addition, the researchers would like to see a greater focus on the interests of the language sector itself. This would make it possible to provide active support for renewal, rejuvenation, and cooperation within the sector.

Finally, the researchers highlight the added value of cooperation within the language sector, as it could open up new opportunities for existing businesses and contribute to organized and orchestrated advocacy for the language sector as a whole, for example among government bodies and educational establishments.

<sup>1</sup> Maaïke Verrips, Dries Debackere, and Ronnie Antonius, *On the economic importance of language. An exploration of the language sector in the Dutch language area* (report in Dutch), Dutch Language Union, 2018, download: <https://taalunie.org/publicaties/37/over-de-economische-betekenis-van-taal>. Responsible publisher: Kevin De Coninck, Dutch Language Union, Paleisstraat 9, 2514 JA The Hague, The Netherlands.

