**Course Topic:   Language, Society and Culture**

**Course Instructor**

**Dianne Tyers** has held numerous English language teaching, training and management positions over the past 22 years in six different countries.  She owns Advance Consulting for Education, INC, an English language teacher training and curriculum development company.  Dianne is currently a PhD candidate at OISE, University of Toronto and has a Masters of Applied Linguistics (University of Queensland) and an MBA (University of Western Ontario).  She has presented at local, national and international conferences on teaching and management techniques, culture, and language learning.

**Course Synopsis**

In this video, we will look at the phenomenon of English as a Global Language.  In recent decades, the use of English has extended to every corner of the globe.  English is so widespread that it is now commonly regarded as a global language.  In this session, we will introduce some of the terms and concepts that go along with the idea of a global language.  We will then take a look at the criteria for determining if a language is, in fact, a global language and analyze the most spoken languages in the world according to these criteria.  We will examine some of the forces that push a language beyond its natural regional boundaries as well as some of the implications for any language that becomes a global language.  Finally, we will examine the global spread of English and discuss the concept of World Englishes.

**Course Agenda**

1. Layers of Language Use
2. Important Terminology
3. Criteria for Determining a Global Language
4. Forces that Create a Global Language
5. Implications of a Global Language
6. English as a Global Language

## 1. Layers of Language Use

In order to understand the full range of language use, we will break down language use into four layers, as shown in the pyramid below.

**Global Languages**

**Languages**

**Dialects, Creoles, Pidgins**
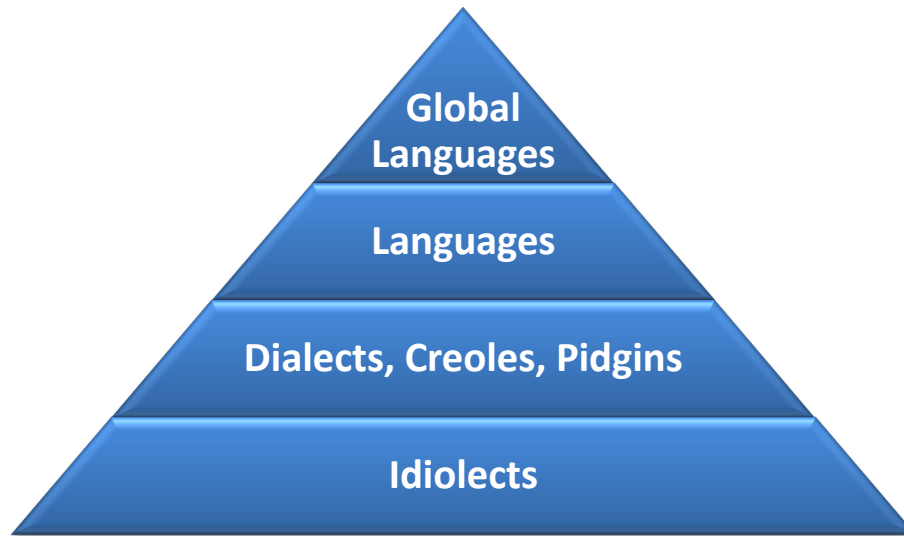
**Idiolects**

An **idiolect** is a unique language that every individual creates for himself or herself.  Each person makes idiosyncratic or individual choices about how they are going to use language, such as favourite words and expressions or unique ways of using intonation.

**Dialects, creoles and pidgins** are formed when small groups of people make choices about how they will collectively use language.

A **language** is formed when a larger group of people get together and decide upon a standard way of communicating, involving set grammar rules, vocabulary and pronunciation.

A **global language** is a language with a broad range of use that is spoken by millions and sometimes billions of people to communicate on an international scale.

## 2. Important Terminology

Let's take a look at some of the important terminology associated with the topic of global languages.

*Lingua Franca:* a language used for communication between two or more people who do not have the same first language.  A lingua franca is often thought of as a *transactional* language because it is used for a clear purpose, such as a business transaction or an exchange of information.

*International Language:* a language that is used across national boundaries.  One idea that is foundational to an international language is that it is possible to use a language outside of its home country without transmitting the culture that is associated with that language.  While this concept of

language use without the associated cultural element is an integral part of the definition of an international language, research shows that it is, in fact, almost impossible to separate language from culture.

***International Auxiliary Language:*** a planned language that is systematically and scientifically created in order to allow people with different first languages to communicate.  The main reason for an international auxiliary language is to avoid giving power to an existing language and to instead have people collaborate to create a neutral language that everyone can easily learn.  The classic example of an international auxiliary language is *Esperanto* (literally, 'one who hopes'), which was created in the late 1800's.  Esperanto was deliberately designed to include standardized grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, making it very easy to learn because it is so systematic and methodical.

There are several problems with the idea of a planned language.  First of all, it completely goes against how we, as human beings, use language in that it has no meaningful connection to the soul of humanity.  Another problem is that it removes the creative element from language use.  The final significant issue with a planned language is that, while it may start out as a highly standardized language, over time, humans will change the language until it is no longer standardized.

***Linguistic Imperialism:***  when a group of people move into a region and impose their language on the native people of that region.  This was very commonly done in the past 400-500 years with colonization for economic and political purposes.  Linguistic imperialism explains why languages such as Spanish, French, Portuguese and English are widely spoken across a range of geographical locations.

***Global Language:***  a language whose usage spreads all over the world and into every sphere of life (education, science, technology, personal communication, culture, etc.).


## 3. Criteria for Determining a Global Language

While many languages have spread internationally at various points in time, there are several criteria that scholars use today to determine if a language is, in fact, a *global* language.  These are:

- The number of native speakers
- The total number of speakers
- The geographical reach
- How easy it is to learn
- How useful it is
- How well language learning is supported
- How much cultural currency the language has


### A.   The Number of Speakers of a Language

When analyzing the number of speakers of a language, it is important to look at two sets of figures: the number of native speakers of the language and the number of people who have learned the language in addition to their first language.  The charts below rank the eight most spoken languages in the world.

The first chart ranks the languages according to the number of *native* speakers and the second chart
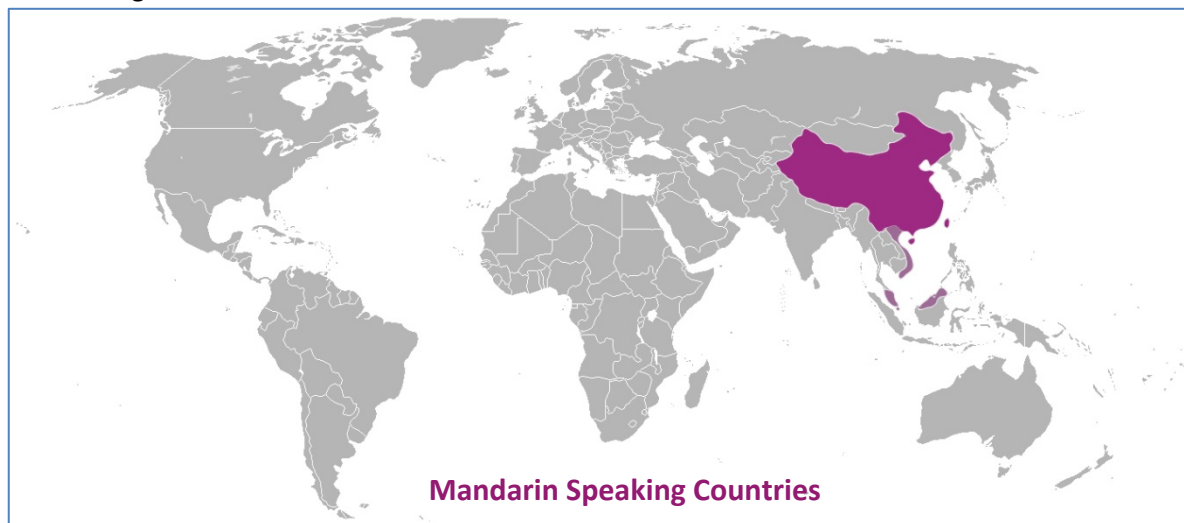
| | Language | Native Speakers | Total Speakers |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Mandarin** | **845 million** | 1.3 billion |
| 2 | **English** | **330 million** | 1.8 billion |
| 3 | **Spanish** | **330 million** | 500 million |
| 4 | **Hindustani** | **325 million** | 490 million |
| 5 | **Arabic** | **221 million** | 450 million |
| 6 | **Portuguese** | **178 million** | 220 million |
| 7 | **Russian** | **144 million** | 399 million |
| 8 | **French** | **100 million** | 500 million |

ranks the languages in order of *total* speakers of the language.

| | Language | Native Speakers | Total Speakers |
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| 1 | **English** | 330 million | **1.8 billion** |
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## B.   The Geographical Reach of a Language

The next criterion we need to consider when attempting to determine if a language can be classified as a global language is the geographical reach of the language.  The following maps examine the same 8 languages, discussed previously, in terms of how extensively the languages have spread to other regions across the globe.



**Mandarin Speaking Countries**

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The Professional
Development Exchange

**Spanish Speaking Countries**

**Arabic Speaking Countries**

**Portuguese Speaking Countries**

www.aceducation.ca 5

**Russian Speaking Countries**

**French Speaking Countries**

**English Speaking Countries**

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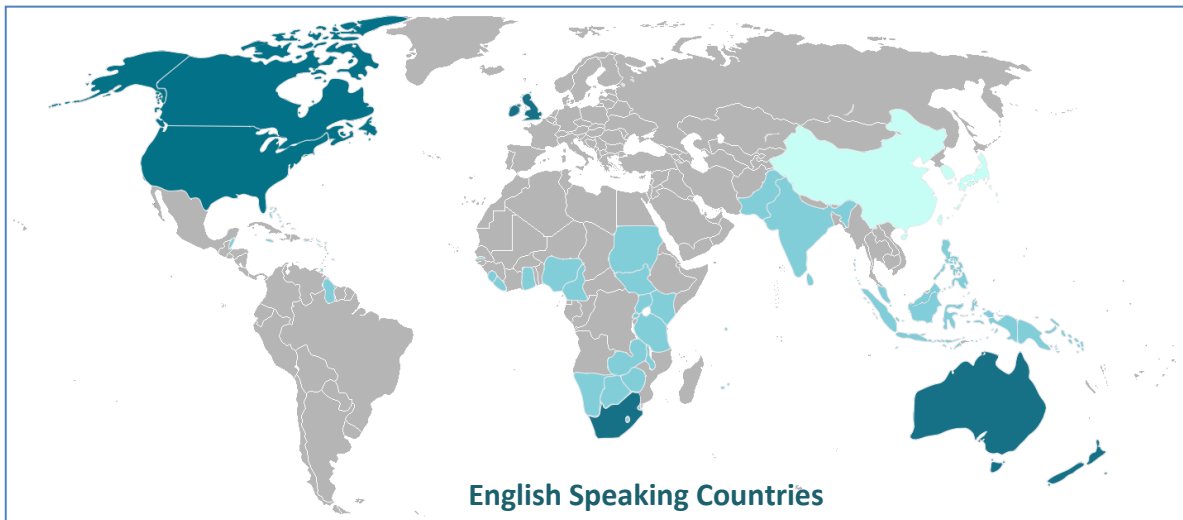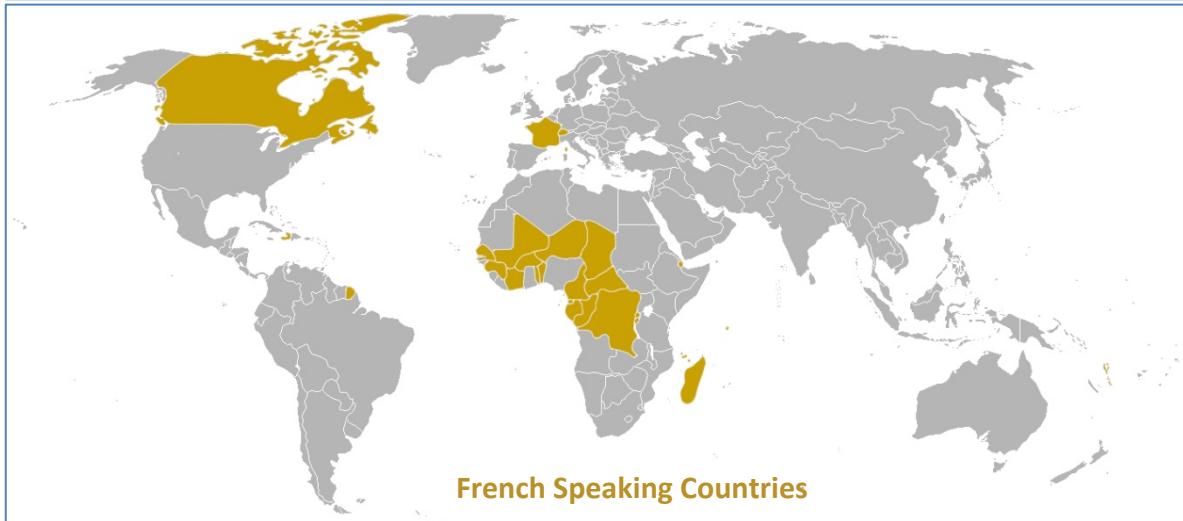
## C.  How Easy a Language is to Learn

It is logical to assume that a language that is easy to learn has a greater potential to spread around the world because more people will be willing to learn it.  Some factors that make a language easier to learn are:

- Easy to pronounce sounds
- Clear and concise grammar
- Standardized, consistent grammar
- A simple written system
- An oral system that is closely related to the written system

Let's examine some of the languages we have previously discussed according to these factors. Mandarin tends to be a difficult language to learn due to its challenging writing system.  Spanish is a relatively easy language to learn because it has fairly easy grammar and because of the close correspondence between the oral and written language.  Portuguese and French are somewhat similar to Spanish in that the grammar is fairly easy; however, the oral and written language are not as closely matched, making these languages slightly more challenging to learn.  English is an interesting language in terms of ease of learning.  Most of the sounds of English are fairly easy to pronounce and the grammar is not overly complex.  The greatest learning challenges arise with English because there are so many exceptions to the rules and because of the distance between how the language is spoken and how it is written.

## D.  How Useful a Language Is

The usefulness of a language is another important criterion when attempting to determine if a language is or could be a global language. A language can be considered useful if it:

- Can be used to express a wide range of ideas
- Can be used in a wide variety of situations
- Can be used to discuss complex ideas
- Has a large vocabulary

The English language meets all of the above criteria and for this reason, is head and shoulders above the other languages we have discussed.  It is particularly useful because it has the largest vocabulary of any language in the world.  The total number of words ranges from 500,000 to several million words, varying greatly due to the difficulty in determining what constitutes 'a word'.

## E.  How Well Language Learning is Supported

The more access people have to resources to learn a language, the more potential that language has to become a global language.  There are several factors to consider:

- How easy is it to access textbooks, audio and video resources for the language?
- How many websites are available in the language?
- How many teachers and schools are available to teach the language?

National governments make clear and conscious choices about whether or not to promote the learning of their language beyond the country's borders.  For instance, the British government has an arm called

the British Council that is responsible for promoting the use of English and English culture all over the world.  English is fairly far ahead of other languages in terms of the availability of teaching and learning materials.  The teaching and learning of English is a multi-billion dollar industry globally and we see this reflected in the sheer number of people learning English – there are more people learning English than there are native speakers of the language.  It is estimated that at any given time, there are over a billion people learning the English language.

### F.    How Much Cultural Currency the Language Has

*Cultural Currency* is the extent of cultural material a person can get access to if they learn a language.  This can include music, literature, art, movies, tv shows, etc.  The more powerful the culture that goes with the language, the more powerful the language itself.  Another factor to consider is how fashionable or trendy it is to learn a particular language.  A language that is culturally popular will have more power and more cultural currency.

If we evaluate the English language using these characteristics, we can see that there is a lot of evidence in favour of English being positioned as a global language.

Number of native speakers:

Number of total speakers:

Geographical Reach:

Easy to Learn:

Usefulness:

Learning support:

Cultural currency:

## 4.  Forces that Create a Global Language

Just because a language has some or all of the characteristics of a global language, does not guarantee that it will become and remain a global language.  There are forces at play that help to position a language for the global stage by pushing its use beyond its natural regional boundaries.  These forces include:

- Trade and commerce
- Military forces
- Colonial forces
- Religious forces
- Political and ideological forces

- Diplomatic forces
- Cultural forces
- Technological forces
- Migratory forces
- Population growth

The chart below illustrates the languages we have examined in this session and the main forces that contributed to the spread of these languages.

| Language | Main Forces at Play |
|---|---|
| Latin | Military and religious |
| Arabic | Trade and Commerce, religious, military |
| Portuguese | Colonial, population growth |
| French | Colonial |
| Spanish | Colonial, military, population growth, migratory |
| Russian | Political and ideological, military |
| Hindustani | Trade and commerce, population growth |
| Mandarin | Trade and commerce, population growth |
| English | Trade and Commerce, military, colonial, cultural, migratory, population growth |

The following video covers a very brief history of the English language and allows you to see how the forces discussed in this section shaped the English language into the global language that it is today.

### The History of English in 10 Minutes
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3r9bOkYW9s

* If the above link does not work, go to www.youtube.com and search for the title of the video clip.


## 5. Implications of a Global Language

There are implications for a language when it becomes a global language. Some of the positive implications are that the language is vigorous, creative, cutting edge and always undergoing changes.

On the other hand, some interesting complications arise when such a large number of people are speaking a language. When a language becomes a global language, the number of non-native speakers exceeds the number of native speakers of the language. This leads to the question of who 'owns' the language or who sets the standard for the language – the native speakers or the non-native speakers. Another interesting implication is the development of different dialects due to the sheer number of speakers of the language and the various forces acting upon the language in different parts of the world. Over time, these dialects may become mutually incomprehensible, as we have seen with Latin.


## 6. English as a Global Language

With the prominence of English on the world stage, the concept of World Englishes has emerged. These are divided into primary, secondary and tertiary Englishes as illustrated in the diagram below.
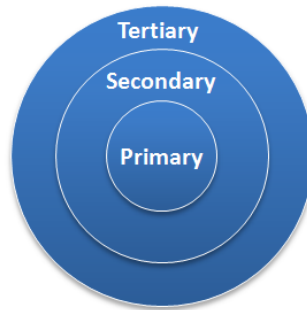
**Primary Englishes** are found in countries where native speakers reside, for example:  Canada, The U.S.A., The U.K., Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa.

**Secondary Englishes** are found in regions of the world where English has had a presence for quite a long time and a distinct dialect of English had developed as a result.  These Englishes are not considered 'native' and typically do not hold the same prestige as primary Englishes.  An example of a Secondary English is the version of English spoken in the Indian Subcontinent.

 **Tertiary Englishes** are dialects or versions of English in regions where English has developed a presence more recently and is just gaining traction, for example:  Korea, Japan and China.

While the concept of World Englishes helps us articulate the spread of English from a core set of countries out into a broader range of countries worldwide, some people argue with this model because of the implied level of prestige associated with the different Englishes.  For instance, the Primary Englishes hold more prestige than the Secondary Englishes, which hold more prestige than the Tertiary Englishes.

The map below illustrates the geographic spread of Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Englishes.
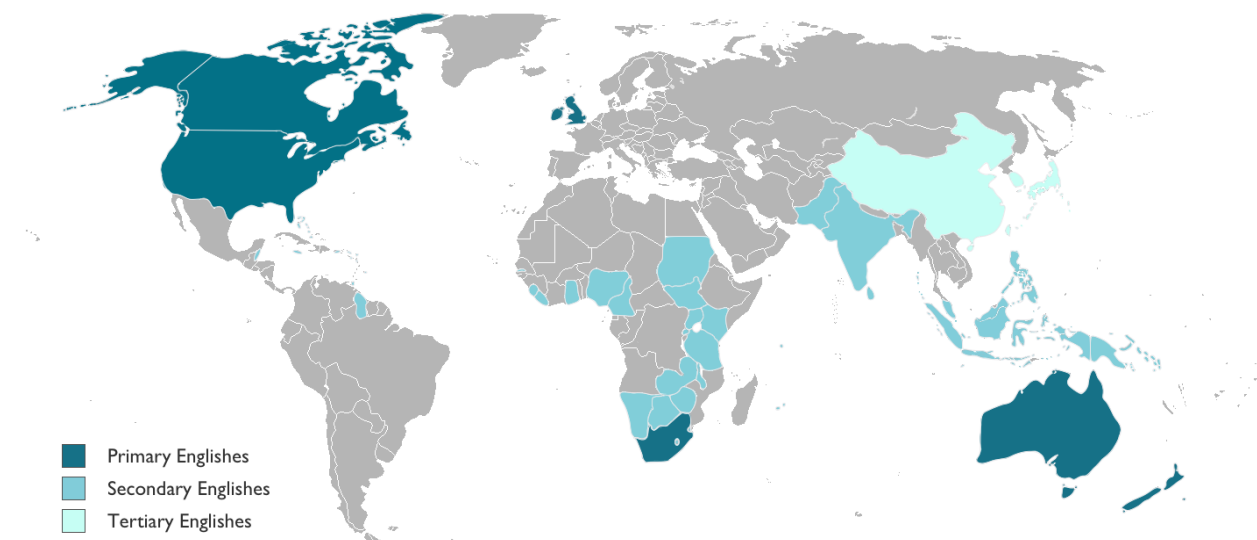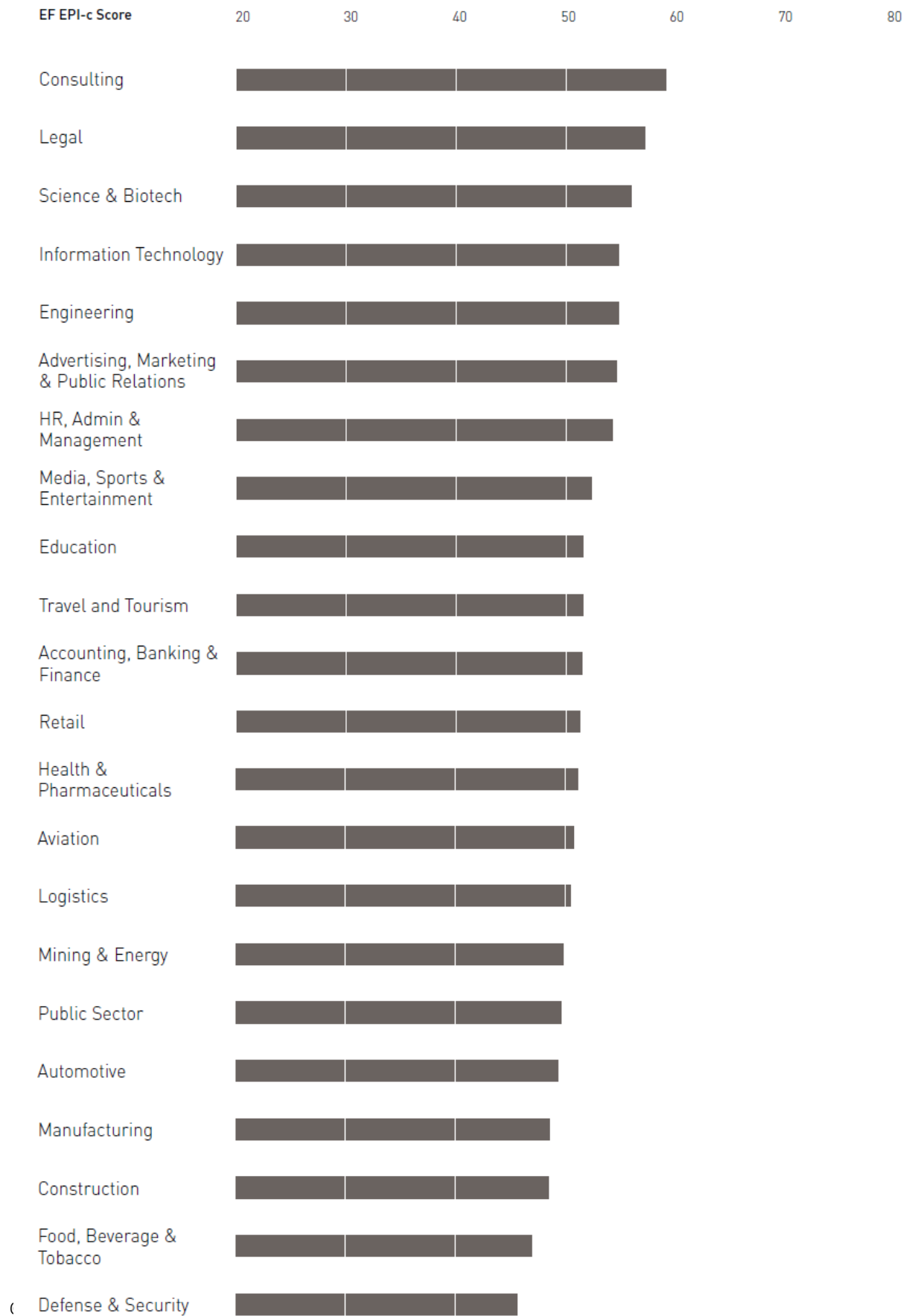
The following images were taken from the English First 2014 English Proficiency Index (EPI) Infographic and illustrate the varying levels of English language proficiency in different regions around the world as well as by sector.



EF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY INDEX MAP

PROFICIENCY BANDS  ● Very High  ● High  ● Moderate  ● Low  ● Very Low
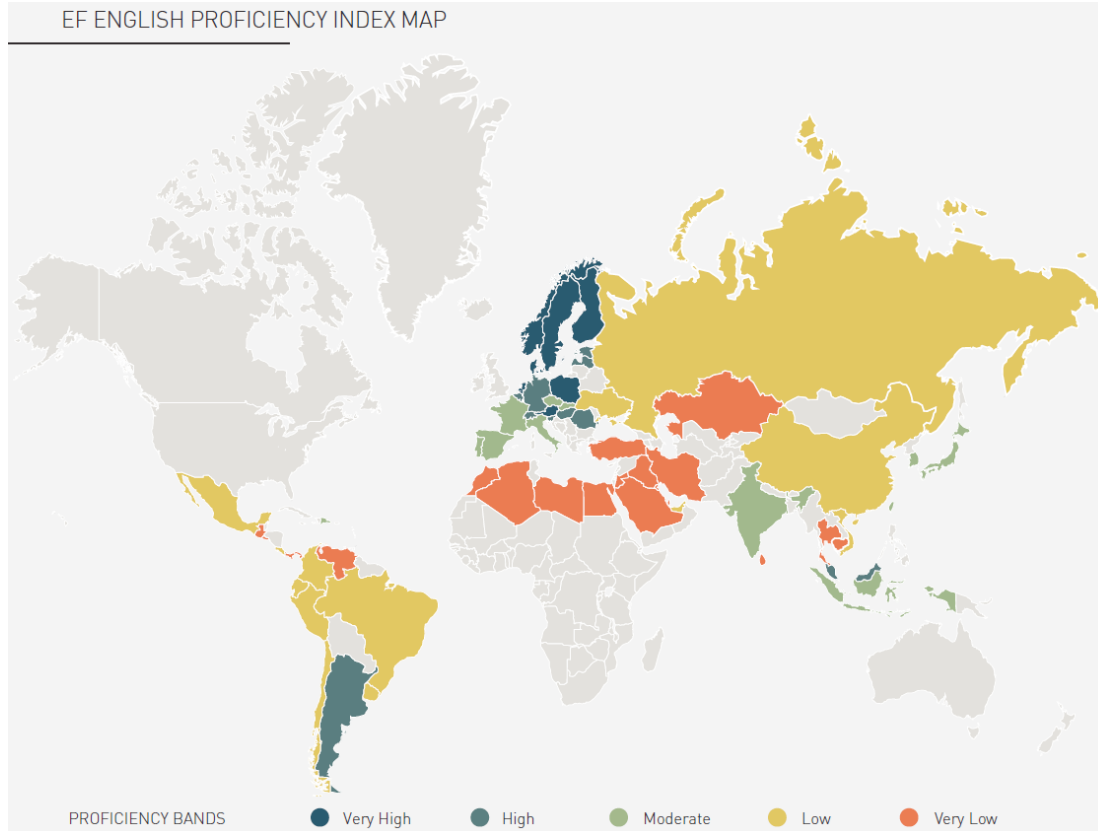
EF EPI 2014 RANKINGS

| VERY HIGH PROFICIENCY | | |
|---|---|---|
| 01 | Denmark | 69.30 |
| 02 | Netherlands | 68.99 |
| 03 | Sweden | 67.80 |
| 04 | Finland | 64.40 |
| 05 | Norway | 64.33 |
| 06 | Poland | 64.26 |
| 07 | Austria | 63.21 |

| HIGH PROFICIENCY | | |
|---|---|---|
| 08 | Estonia | 61.39 |
| 09 | Belgium | 61.21 |
| 10 | Germany | 60.89 |
| 11 | Slovenia | 60.60 |
| 12 | Malaysia | 59.73 |
| 13 | Singapore | 59.58 |
| 14 | Latvia | 59.43 |
| 15 | Argentina | 59.02 |
| 16 | Romania | 58.63 |
| 17 | Hungary | 58.55 |
| 18 | Switzerland | 58.29 |

| MODERATE PROFICIENCY | | |
|---|---|---|
| 19 | Czech Republic | 57.42 |
| 20 | Spain | 57.18 |
| 21 | Portugal | 56.83 |
| 22 | Slovakia | 55.96 |
| 23 | Dominican Republic | 53.66 |
| 24 | South Korea | 53.62 |
| 25 | India | 53.54 |
| 26 | Japan | 52.88 |
| 27 | Italy | 52.80 |
| 28 | Indonesia | 52.74 |
| 29 | France | 52.69 |
| 30 | Taiwan | 52.56 |
| 31 | Hong Kong | 52.50 |

| LOW PROFICIENCY | | |
|---|---|---|
| 32 | U.A.E. | 51.80 |
| 33 | Vietnam | 51.57 |
| 34 | Peru | 51.46 |
| 35 | Ecuador | 51.05 |
| 36 | Russia | 50.44 |
| 37 | China | 50.15 |
| 38 | Brazil | 49.96 |
| 39 | Mexico | 49.83 |
| 40 | Uruguay | 49.61 |
| 41 | Chile | 48.75 |
| 42 | Colombia | 48.54 |
| 43 | Costa Rica | 48.53 |
| 44 | Ukraine | 48.50 |

| VERY LOW PROFICIENCY | | |
|---|---|---|
| 45 | Jordan | 47.82 |
| 46 | Qatar | 47.81 |
| 47 | Turkey | 47.80 |
| 48 | Thailand | 47.79 |
| 49 | Sri Lanka | 46.37 |
| 50 | Venezuela | 46.12 |
| 51 | Guatemala | 45.77 |
| 52 | Panama | 43.70 |
| 53 | El Salvador | 43.46 |
| 54 | Kazakhstan | 42.97 |
| 55 | Morocco | 42.43 |
| 56 | Egypt | 42.13 |
| 57 | Iran | 41.83 |
| 58 | Kuwait | 41.80 |
| 59 | Saudi Arabia | 39.48 |
| 60 | Algeria | 38.51 |
| 61 | Cambodia | 38.25 |
| 62 | Libya | 38.19 |
| 63 | Iraq | 38.02 |

EF EPI-c Score

| | 20 | 30 | 40 | 50 | 60 | 70 | 80 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Consulting

Legal

Science & Biotech

Information Technology

Engineering

Advertising, Marketing & Public Relations

HR, Admin & Management

Media, Sports & Entertainment

Education

Travel and Tourism

Accounting, Banking & Finance

Retail

Health & Pharmaceuticals

Aviation

Logistics

Mining & Energy

Public Sector

Automotive

Manufacturing

Construction

Food, Beverage & Tobacco

Defense & Security

We'll finish off this session with an intriguing question:  If you believe that English is a global language, what do you think the future of English will look like?  Will it continue to spread and dominate?  Will it fragment off into eventually mutually incomprehensible dialects?  OR will another language rise up and displace English as a global language?


**Thanks for Participating!**


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