

English as the EU language?

Level: Upper Intermediate and above

Timing: 90 minutes plus

Material needed: One copy of the worksheet, one copy of either Article A or Article B and one copy of the vocabulary record per student

Group size: Any

Overview

This lesson plan for both pre-experience and in-work business students is based around an original article first published in *Business Spotlight* Issue 5/2013. The article is about whether English should be the official language of the European Union (EU). Two experts – neither of whom works in the UK – give their professional opinions and back these up with facts and arguments.

The tasks in the worksheets ensure that the students understand the content of the article and the language used, and also provide extra questions for discussion and writing tips.

The teacher's notes provide suggestions for teaching and learning strategies as well as ideas on how to present the tasks in the classroom, any necessary answer keys, and extension tasks (for in class or as homework).

Lead-in

These questions are meant to introduce the topic of languages in the EU. The answer to the first question can be found in the article, the second cannot. You could ask the students to write down as many EU languages as they can think of. If the students work in pairs or small groups, you could turn this into a mini competition.

Key:

The EU has 24 official languages.

They are (in alphabetical order): Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovene, Spanish and Swedish.

Find the information

Before you hand out the articles, ask the students to suggest answers to these questions. Then, divide the class into two equal groups. The students in group A should get a copy of Article A and the students in group B should get a copy of Article B. They should scan their articles and find the answers, then share them with a student from the other group.

Key:

Article A: 1. Joachim Gauck is the German president; 2. 95%; 3. French but this is gradually being replaced by English; 4. Volkswagen
Article B: 5. zeitgeist, übercool, dollars, glitz, wanderlust; 6. The British Council

Language

Put students in pairs or groups (with both articles) and ask them to match the multi-word expressions with their definitions and then find them in the articles.

Key:

1. d; 2. e; 3. a; 4. c; 5. b

Key words

Tell students to match the key words from their article to their meanings and then find them in their article to read them in context. When they have completed this task, they should share this vocabulary information with a student who has read the other article.

Key:

Article A: 1. diversity; 2. hegemony; 3. hybrid; 4. trade; 5. proficiency; 6. nonsense; 7. public; 8. draft; 9. monolingualism; 10. imposing;
Article B: 1. legacy; 2. whiff; 3. prosperity; 4. evolve; 5. encourage; 6. plurilingualism; 7. fundamental; 8. prestigious; 9. asset; 10. slipping on

Exchanging information

First of all, students should work alone to decide what the main arguments are in their article. Then they should explain these points to their partner, who has read the other article. Working in pairs or small groups, all the students then write the main arguments from both Article A and Article B into the table.

English as the EU language?

Key:

Article A	Article B
<p><i>It could intensify the linguistic hegemony of English and condemn all other languages to second-class status.</i></p> <p><i>English proficiency varies widely in different EU countries. In places like Portugal or Hungary, 95% of the population know no English.</i></p> <p><i>EU law must be made known in the main language of each member state.</i></p> <p><i>A move towards monolingualism and monoculturalism threatens the status, cultural universes and cosmologies of other languages that have evolved over centuries.</i></p> <p><i>Researchers are usually creative in their own native language, even if they have good foreign-language skills. 'Getting by' in a foreign language is not what is needed in complex EU negotiations, in high-level business transactions or in intellectually demanding activities in higher education and research.</i></p> <p><i>It is a myth that a single language in a country or a region guarantees peace and harmony.</i></p>	<p><i>Europe has nothing to fear from English becoming the main language of communication. A large part of its success is that English is constantly evolving through contact with other languages.</i></p> <p><i>English belongs to the world as much as to us in the UK. It opens doors and creates prosperity for people across the globe. It does not seek to elbow out mother tongues, but to coexist and continue to evolve alongside other languages.</i></p> <p><i>English has become a language spoken by millions of people in EU countries. It has become a shared cultural asset, which everyone in Europe can make use of and contribute to.</i></p>

Discussion

These questions relate directly to the articles and allow students to bring in and discuss their own personal opinions about, and attitudes towards, the topics addressed.

Creative writing

In Article B, the author says, '... speaking English is rather like slipping on a new coat: some may come to feel

completely comfortable wearing it, while others won't'. Test students' (English) language creativity by asking them to complete the sentence with their own ideas and opinions.

Creative writing

While some students will relish the challenge, others may view the idea of creative writing as an insurmountable task. One reason for this is that some people are simply more creative than others.

Therefore, in order to make this task manageable for all students, you could:

- Brainstorm and make a note on the board of possible answers as a class before the students write their individual statements.
- Encourage students to doodle (draw simple patterns and pictures while they are talking or thinking).
- Have students work together in pairs or small groups and produce more than one statement.
- Ask students to close their eyes while you read out the sentence beginning. Pause after you have read the sentence beginning to give them time to create images in their mind and acknowledge any emotions that the words evoke. After a few seconds, they should open their eyes and draw or write what came into their minds.
- Get creative students to help the less-creative ones by sharing and adapting their statements.
- If all else fails, gather ideas from the more creative students (make sure you have some ideas of your own too), write these on the board and have each student choose one of these ideas to copy or adapt.

Related topics on onestopenglish

For follow-up lessons on related topics go to the following lesson plans and articles on onestopenglish:

Business tasks: Studying and learning: <http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-tasks/studying-and-learning/>

You may also find topical and relevant *Guardian* news lessons here on onestopenglish: <http://www.onestopenglish.com/skills/news-lessons/>

English as the EU language?

1 Lead-in

Answer the questions below.

- How many official languages are spoken in the EU (European Union)?
- How many of them can you name?

2 Find the information

Scan the articles and find the answers to the questions below.

1. Who is Joachim Gauck?
2. What percentage of people in Portugal and Hungary speak no English?
3. What language are EU policy documents planned in?
4. Which company has published a book about language and creativity?
5. Which German words are regularly used in English?
6. Who recently published a report titled 'Language Rich Europe'?

3 Language

Match each of these multi-word expressions in the left-hand column with the best definition in the right-hand column.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1. to get by | a. used for saying that something must be done, however difficult it is or however much damage it causes |
| 2. to elbow someone / something out | b. to use something for a particular purpose, especially one that brings a benefit to you |
| 3. at all costs | c. you cannot dispute that something is true |
| 4. no denying the fact (that ...) | d. to have just enough of something, such as money or knowledge, so that you can do what you need to do |
| 5. to make use of | e. to make something go away so that something else can take its place |

English as the EU language?

4 Key words

Match the key words to their meanings and find them in the article to read them in context.

Article A

draft	diversity	hegemony	hybrid	imposing
monolingualism	nonsense	proficiency	public	trade

1. the fact that very different people or things exist within a group or place _____
2. political control or influence, especially by one country over other countries _____
3. a mixture of different things or styles _____
4. the activities of buying and selling goods or services _____
5. a high degree of ability or skill in something _____
6. ideas, behaviour or statements that are not true or sensible _____
7. people in general _____
8. to write something such as a legal document, speech or letter that may have changes made to it before it is finished _____
9. the condition of being able to speak, write or use just one language _____
10. introducing something and forcing people to accept it _____

Article B

asset	encourage	evolve	fundamental	legacy
plurilingualism	prestigious	prosperity	slipping on	whiff

1. something such as a tradition or problem that exists as a result of something that happened in the past _____
2. a slight (possibly bad) smell _____
3. the situation of being successful and having a lot of money _____
4. to gradually change and develop over a period of time _____
5. to suggest that someone does something that you believe would be good, and to help them do it _____
6. speaking more than one language and able to switch between languages according to circumstances _____
7. essential to the existence, development or success of something _____
8. admired and respected _____
9. a major benefit _____
10. to put clothes on (without fuss or effort) _____

English as the EU language?

English as the EU language?

Article A



NO!

“It could intensify the linguistic hegemony of English”
ROBERT PHILLIPSON

be made known in the main language of each member state, the EU now has 24 official languages. The languages spoken or written by staff in EU institutions will depend on the context. To communicate internally with member states or with the public, they may need to use one language, a few, many or all the languages.

1 Joachim Gauck’s promotion of English as a unifying language for the EU is irresponsible. The German president uses the words *lingua franca* and *common language* without defining them. He ignores the complexities of managing linguistic diversity nationally and internationally. Demanding that English become the official EU language could intensify the linguistic hegemony of English and condemn all other languages to second-class status.

2 “There is no more emotional topic in the EU than the language issue,” as Wilhelm Schönfelder, then Head of Mission for Germany at the EU, told the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. Language policy has always been politically sensitive in the EU.

3 There are many *lingua francas* in use in Europe. The original *lingua franca* was a hybrid form of communication based largely on Italian, with elements of French, Greek, Arabic, etc. It evolved as the language of trade in the eastern Mediterranean during the Renaissance. It was not a complete language serving all state functions.

4 Gauck assumes that English is universally relevant “in all situations and at all ages”. This ignores the fact that English proficiency varies widely in different EU countries. It is nonsense to write that English or French will help you in places like Portugal or Hungary, where 95% of the population know no English.

5 The Treaty of Rome (1957) promoted the national language system to the supranational level. Because EU law must

6 Although Gauck was probably not referring to this level of EU functioning, one wonders whether he is aware that market forces have led to English gradually replacing French as *primus inter pares* when it comes to drafting policy documents in the Commission. This is a significant development, because it means that EU texts are now mainly developed in English, meaning English ideas get translated into other languages. This move towards monolingualism and monoculturalism threatens the status, cultural universes and cosmologies of other languages that have evolved over centuries.

7 The Volkswagen Foundation has published an excellent book on the possible threat English poses to German: *Deutsch in der Wissenschaft: Ein politischer und wissenschaftlicher Diskurs*. It shows that researchers are usually creative in their own native language, even if they have good foreign-language skills. “Getting by” in a foreign language is not what is needed in complex EU negotiations, in high-level business transactions or in intellectually demanding activities in higher education and research.

8 It is a myth that a single language in a country or, in Gauck’s proposal, a region, guarantees peace and harmony. Europe’s strong tradition of imposing monolingualism has failed to get rid of minority languages.

ROBERT PHILLIPSON is a professor at Copenhagen Business School and author of books on language policy, linguistic imperialism, language rights and multilingual education.

© Business Spotlight, 5/2013, www.business-spotlight.de

English as the EU language?

English as the EU language?

Article B



YES!

“English has become a language spoken by millions in the EU”
JOHN WHITEHEAD

The British Council encourages the use of English, but not at all costs. Above the drive to promote a single language comes respect for the global diversity of cultures and their languages. In our recent ‘Language Rich Europe’ report, we recommend using the particular position of English in Europe to support multi- and plurilingualism.

The right of children to a high-quality education in a language they understand is also fundamental. But more is not always better. English, like many useful things such as medicines and sharp objects, can have its side effects. Imagine you are an Italian economics professor at a prestigious university in Italy, and suddenly, you are told that you have to deliver your lectures in English. Imagine you are a five-year-old child on your first day at school and you do not understand what the teacher says because she is speaking in what, for you, is a new language called English – it will take you a long time to learn anything.

No one is forcing anyone to speak English, but there’s no denying the fact that it has become a language spoken by millions of people in EU countries. More than that, it has become a shared cultural asset, which everyone in Europe can make use of and contribute to. I sometimes feel that speaking English is rather like slipping on a new coat: some may come to feel completely comfortable wearing it, while others won’t.

JOHN WHITEHEAD is the director of the British Council in Germany. He has worked for the British Council for more than 20 years, including in Latin America, North Africa and East Asia.

© *Business Spotlight*, 5/2013, www.business-spotlight.de

- 1 Let’s not fool ourselves: we know the historical reasons why English has become such a widely spoken language. Firstly, as a result of the British Empire, which came to an end some 50 years ago, but which leaves a powerful legacy. Secondly, the global dominance of the US since then. No wonder English seems to have a whiff of imperialism for some.
- 2 However, German president Joachim Gauck is right to believe that Europe has nothing to fear from English becoming the main language of communication. A large part of its success is that English is constantly evolving through contact with other languages. It is partly German anyway: words such as *zeitgeist* or *ubercool* have long been absorbed into the language.
- 3 English is not a British neocolonial tool to gain power, but a language that belongs to the world as much as to us in the UK. It opens doors and creates prosperity for people across the globe. It does not seek to elbow out mother tongues, but to coexist and continue to evolve alongside other languages. Herr Gauck would be pleased to know that we have Germany to thank for the words *dollars*, *glitz* and *wanderlust* – three things that bring the UK a great deal.

English as the EU language?

5 Exchanging information

- Tell another student about the main arguments made by the author of 'your' article.
- Write the main arguments from the two articles into the table.

Article A	Article B

6 Discussion

- Who do you agree with more? Why?
- Can you think of any other reasons why English should or should not be the language of the EU?

7 Creative writing

In Article B, John Whitehead says that '... speaking English is rather like slipping on a new coat: some may come to feel completely comfortable wearing it, while others won't.' **Complete the sentence below with your own ideas.**

Speaking English is like _____

English as the EU language?

Vocabulary record: English as the EU language?

verb	noun	adjective (+ opposite)	adverb (+ opposite)
draft			
	dominance		
		unifying	
			internationally

Vocabulary record

