

Greece's disappearing whistled language

Warm up activity

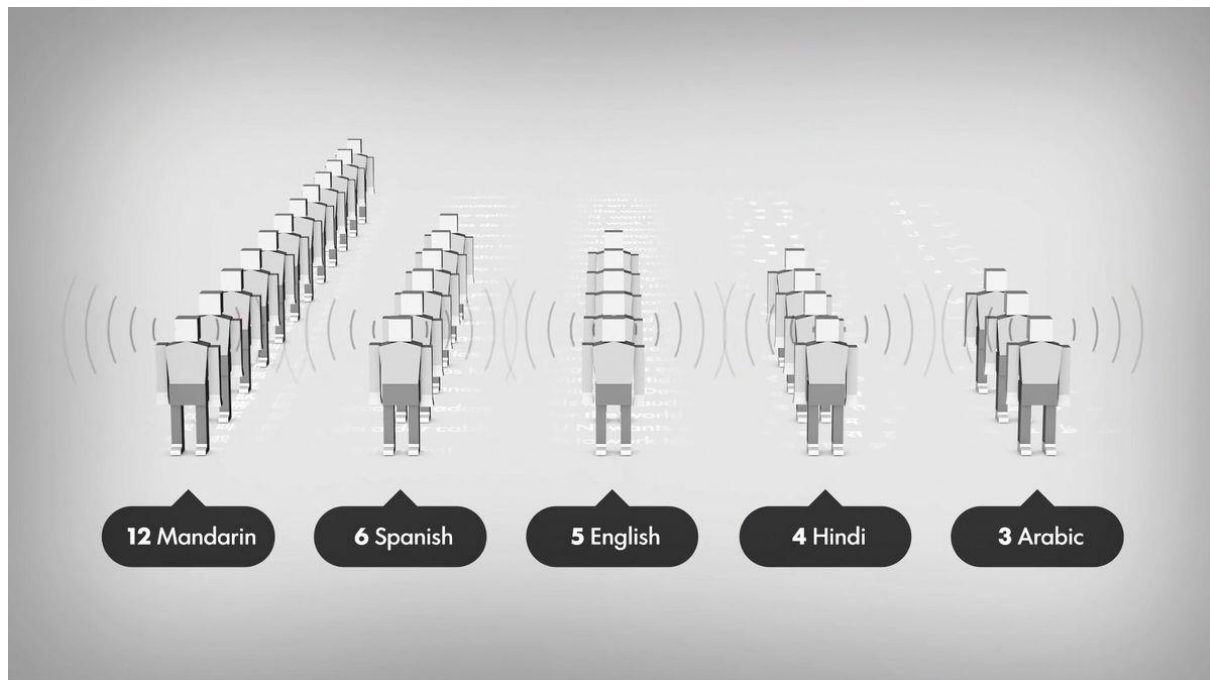
Start by asking students to guess which is the most widespread and the most spoken language in the world. While offering their predictions, they will use a lot of language names. You can write some of the trickier ones on the board (especially *France – French, Finland – Finn, the Netherlands – Dutch* etc.). They should also explain/justify their choices.

You can then show them the picture – infographic – **If the world were 100 people, how many would speak Mandarin, Spanish, English, Hindi, Arabic?** (Watch the whole video [here](#).)

Students match the number of speakers to the particular language: 12, 5, 4, 3 and 6.

Hindi	
English	
Arabic	
Mandarin	
Spanish	

Key: *If the world were 100 people, 12 people would speak Mandarin, 6 would speak Spanish, 5 would speak Hindi and 3 would speak Arabic. The rest of the people (70) would speak 6500 other languages.*



Discuss the results: talk about the popularity of Mandarin Chinese and the reasons behind it, the historical background of Spanish being placed the second etc. Use the map of the world to show where each of the top five languages is spoken.

European Day of Languages

Activity 1

Ask students to tell you about different ways of communication. Are spoken/written languages the only way people can express themselves?

They will probably mention sign languages, codes, music etc. Tell them that they are going to watch a short BBC film (2:06 min) about **the Greece's disappearing whistled language**. You will find the video at this [link](#). After watching it, they should answer the following questions:

- 1 What is the name of this disappearing language?
- 2 Does this language use letters and alphabet?
- 3 Who uses this language? Is it used in big cities?
- 4 Why don't they use a *normal* language made up of words?
- 5 Why is this language in danger of dying out?
- 6 Why should the speakers try hard to keep this language alive? Do you agree?



Key: 1. Sfyria; 2 No, it doesn't. It uses whistles; 3 It is mostly used by farmers and shepherds in a tiny Greek village called Antia; 4 It was easier to hear whistles than voices when they called their family across the hills and valleys. Whistles travel much faster and further than normal speech; 5 Because villagers are moving into cities and the modern world has changed their way of life. In 1980 there were 250 inhabitants, now there are only 37 of them left; 6 It is very important to keep the tradition alive even if the language is becoming less and less useful. It has always been passed down by generations of speakers.

Background info for teachers

There are 70 groups of people across the world who use some kind of whistles not only to call attention but also to carry meaning with all the flexibility and richness of normal speech. It is especially common in mountains, in every corner of the globe. Those people are often called "people who talk like birds". For instance, the Hmong people in the Himalayas speak in whistles to chat across the fields. This is the proof of humanity's amazing linguistic diversity. Languages and music both refer to the same brain regions.

Activity 2

Students work in small groups and brainstorm the **advantages of learning more than one language**. Possible answers may include: *makes it easier to travel, watch films without subtitles, improves different brain functions, keeps you healthy, teaches you problem solving, makes you more open to new experiences and new cultures, accepts differences in opinion and lifestyle more easily, improves your chances of finding a better job in the future* etc.

The groups compare their lists and discuss the differences and similarities between them.

European Day of Languages

They watch a **short video** (1:20 min) made by The World Economic Forum – **Learning a new language makes you more tolerant**. Find the video at this [link](#).

After watching the video, ask students to do a **matching task**. They need to match the expressions to their explanations. Help them with more difficult vocabulary (*ambiguous, social cues, competence*). They should just grasp the general meaning of the concepts, they do not have to learn individual vocabulary items. Compare their lists to the advantages mentioned in the video.

1 CULTURAL COMPETENCE	Improves your social intelligence by enabling you to understand <i>social cues</i> .
2 ENTREPRENEURIAL	Ready to take risks by starting a new business
3 PRACTICAL INTELLIGENCE	Common sense
4 TOLERANCE OF AMBIGUITY	It opens up your mind to the new ways of thinking and accepting differences.

Wrap-up activity

Students **write a short paragraph** (200-300 words) entitled *The Benefits of Learning Foreign Languages*. They need to explain if, and in what ways, the learning of one or more foreign languages has helped them:

- enrich their travelling experience
- improve their chances of making international friends
- develop tolerance
- deepen their knowledge of the world/different cultures
- develop critical thinking.

They should accompany their texts with a picture of their choice.

Display their compositions to boost motivation for learning foreign languages.