

Knowledge and Language: Lingua Franca

Lesson 3: Listening Task

Focus: *Should English be the dominant language (lingua franca) for global communication and knowledge systems?*

Objectives	<p>Analyze Ruiyuan Yuan's critique of English-language dominance in education, technology, and culture.</p> <p>Explore how language infrastructure shapes access to knowledge and reinforces or resists power structures.</p> <p>Create and analyze claims and counterclaims about linguistic dominance.</p> <p>Reflect on how cultural, political, and technological forces contribute to linguistic inequality.</p>
Steps	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Introduction (5 mins)<ul style="list-style-type: none">Guiding Question: "<i>Should English be the dominant language (lingua franca) for global communication and knowledge systems?</i>"Recap TOK concepts from previous lessons: power, culture, and perspective.Ask students to consider:<ul style="list-style-type: none">What does it mean for one language to dominate a global system?Can language ever be truly neutral, or does it always reflect power and identity?What happens when most knowledge is accessible only through a single language?2. Listening Task<ul style="list-style-type: none">Students watch the video TEDx - Is English a dominating language? and take notes on the speaker(s)' key arguments and counterarguments. In the interest of time, videos can be assigned as homework prior to the class discussion.During note-taking, students should analyze the strength of each argument presented, relating this to their previous research.If necessary, students should seek additional sources to support their analysis.Key Points to Listen For:<ul style="list-style-type: none">What examples does Yuan give of English-language dominance?What are the emotional, social, and political consequences she describes?Does she argue for or against English as a global language — or something more nuanced?How does her personal identity as a non-native English speaker shape her perspective?Note-Taking Framework:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Main arguments for a global language: Facilitates global communication, education, and access to shared knowledge systems (e.g., coding, academia).Main arguments against: Marginalizes other languages, creates access barriers, and reinforces global inequality.Language and identity argument: Language shapes cultural identity and emotional expression; dominance of English risks loss of nuance and belonging.Knowledge access and infrastructure argument: Digital systems are built in English, limiting participation for non-speakers; new tools in other languages may reverse this.Linguistic echo chambers argument: Relying on one language can isolate users from alternative perspectives and global diversity.3. Kialo Discussion (30 mins)<ul style="list-style-type: none">In small groups, students create a new Kialo discussion around the guiding question "<i>Should English be the dominant language (lingua franca) for global communication and knowledge systems?</i>"

- Alternatively, if students require more structure, clone and share [this ready-made discussion](#), based on the starter claims below, and use the suggested pros and cons as prompts for students.
- Students should use their analysis to ensure they select the strongest arguments from the listening task.
- They should add these to the Kialo discussion as arguments, counterarguments, examples, and evaluations.
- Encourage students to refer to the concepts of power, culture, and perspective in their arguments.

Example Claims:

NAME: Should English be the dominant language for global communication and knowledge systems?

THESIS: English should be the dominant language for global communication and knowledge systems.

Starter claim: Using English as a global language improves international collaboration in education, science, and technology.

- PRO: English allows researchers, coders, and professionals to collaborate more easily, reducing translation costs and delays.
 - Example: For example, most scientific journals and academic conferences use English as the standard.
- CON: Relying on English as a global language can reduce the motivation to learn other languages, leading to linguistic homogenization.
 - Example: For example, students and professionals may prioritize English over their native or regional languages, causing these languages to decline in use and status.

Starter claim: English acts as a practical bridge language in multilingual global spaces.

- PRO: English simplifies communication in international travel, diplomacy, and humanitarian work.
 - Example: For example, English is the working language of the UN and many NGOs.
- CON: Using only English risks erasing linguistic and cultural nuance, flattening local expressions and values in translation.
 - Example: For example, culturally rooted concepts often lose meaning when explained in English.

Starter claim: Digital infrastructure runs more efficiently with a single dominant language.

- PRO: Standardizing code, online platforms, and technical documentation in English streamlines innovation.
 - Example: For example, most programming languages and AI systems are built in English.
- CON: This centralization makes non-English users dependent on foreign systems, reducing digital autonomy.
 - Example: For example, Chinese tech developers must work in English-based frameworks to participate globally.

Starter claim: English dominance marginalizes other languages and cultural knowledge systems.

- PRO: Many Indigenous or regional languages lack digital representation, leading to knowledge loss.
 - Example: For example, oral traditions and local epistemologies are rarely digitized in global platforms.
- CON: English can still coexist with native languages if multilingual policies are actively promoted.
 - Example: For example, bilingual education systems and translation tools can help bridge the gap.

	<p>Starter claim: Requiring English for access to knowledge systems reinforces global inequality.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PRO: Language barriers block millions from contributing to academia, coding, and policymaking. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Example: For example, non-native English speakers are underrepresented in global research. • CON: Translation technologies are rapidly improving and may soon reduce these gaps. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Example: For example, tools like Google Translate and DeepL offer near-real-time access to information. <p>Starter claim: Language-specific internet ecosystems reduce exposure to diverse perspectives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PRO: When users stay within their own language online, they form echo chambers and miss cross-cultural understanding. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Example: For example, Chinese, English, and Russian web spaces often operate in parallel with little overlap. • CON: Localized internet ecosystems can protect cultural sovereignty and resist foreign dominance. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Example: For example, countries developing their own digital tools in local languages reclaim control.
Reflection Questions	<p>Reflection (10 mins): Discuss the following reflection questions in open discussion or exit ticket format:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did Ruiyuan Yuan's talk challenge or confirm your assumptions about the role of English in the world? • Do you think a global language unites people or creates new forms of exclusion? Why? • Can we truly preserve cultural identity and local knowledge if one language dominates global systems? • Have you ever felt empowered or disadvantaged because of the language(s) you speak? How did that affect your access to knowledge or participation? • What responsibilities do global platforms, institutions, or individuals have in promoting linguistic equity?
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesson Slides • Debate video: TEDx - Is English a dominating language? • Kialo discussion: Should English be the dominant language for global communication and knowledge systems?
TOK Concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power: How does the global dominance of English shape who can access, produce, and validate knowledge? • Culture: How does the spread of English affect cultural identity and the preservation of diverse knowledge systems? • Perspective: In what ways does speaking English influence which worldviews are amplified or marginalized globally?
Critical Thinking Concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confronting Biases and Assumptions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Identifying Linguistic Perspective Bias: Students reflect on how their own language background shapes what they consider "normal," "neutral," or "universal" in communication and knowledge. ◦ Questioning Linguistic Objectivity: Students examine whether English is truly a neutral global language or a tool shaped by historical, cultural, and geopolitical power — especially Western dominance. ◦ Challenging Language Authority Bias: Students consider how colonial histories, educational systems, and global institutions have elevated English while devaluing or excluding other linguistic and cultural knowledge systems. • Exploring Contexts and Expert Opinions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Power and Language Infrastructure: Students explore how digital platforms, coding languages, and academic publishing systems reinforce English-language dominance and shape global participation.

- Case Study Evaluation: Using Yuan's talk and related case studies (e.g., Arabic censorship, Wikipedia framing, Latin American science), students assess how language affects whose knowledge is seen and trusted.
- Assessing Credibility: Students evaluate how language affects credibility — e.g., whether knowledge in English is assumed more legitimate than knowledge expressed in non-dominant languages.
- **Responsiveness and Flexibility of Thought:**
 - Adapting Arguments: Students revise their assumptions about English as a “neutral” or universally helpful tool after exploring its social and political consequences.
 - Weighing Contradictory Perspectives: Students consider both the unifying and exclusionary effects of a global language — and how linguistic convenience can conflict with equity.
 - Recognizing the Role of Context: Students reflect on how different communities experience language differently online — from empowerment to marginalization — and how that affects access to knowledge.
- **Extrapolation and Reapplication of Principles:**
 - Applying Concepts to Global Contexts: Students explore how linguistic dominance affects real-world issues like media representation, scientific access, digital participation, and cultural erasure.
 - Transferable Skills: Students learn to question how systems — like language, categorization, or infrastructure — can obscure or control access to knowledge, not just in language but across identity, policy, and power.