

The language garden

Level

Pre-intermediate and above (equivalent to CEF level A2–B1 and above)

Comment

This eLesson discusses the threats to minority languages and different attitudes towards this. It goes on to compare the strength of spoken Mandarin with the demise in use of written Chinese characters.

How to use the lesson

- 1 If possible, greet your students in several different languages at the start of the lesson. See if they can identify which languages you are speaking. Students then complete exercise 1. Hear some examples and work on getting students interested here in the different languages, particularly less common (even minority) ones. If appropriate, comment on the influence of other, more dominant languages, eg the English word *ice-cream* is actually used in other languages.
- 2 Before giving out the worksheet, ask students to work alone to consider the questions in exercise 2, then compare answers in pairs. If they find this challenging, then you could assist by adding 'hints' to the numbers on the board, eg 16%, about 870,000,000. However, it is not essential that students get all the answers right at this point. Ensure that they do not read the text yet. Hear some sample answers.
- 3 Hand out the worksheet. Ask students to read the text and find out if their predictions were correct (exercise 3).
- 4 This is a more intensive comprehension task, so be careful to monitor your students to see how much time they need to finish. Allow them to discuss answers with a different partner, before whole class feedback (exercise 4).
- 5 The questions in exercise 5 require students to interpret the statistics and facts, thereby encouraging them to process the information more fully. The answers are not actually given in the text itself (apart from question 3). Let them work together in pairs or threes. Hear suggestions.
- 6 Exercise 6 is an oral fluency activity. Give students two minutes to read the points and choose two that they agree with. Give a time limit for the discussion, to show you expect students to talk freely on the topics, then put students in twos or threes to compare answers.
- 7 Exercise 7 focuses on synonyms in the text. Encourage students to do this by reading the text carefully, using the paragraph references. Of course, in some cases they will not need to look at the text at all. Allow students to check their answers in a dictionary if necessary, to avoid the need for whole class feedback.

Answer key

1 Students' own answers.

2, 3

- 1 (around) 7,000
- 2 (about) 870,000,000
- 3 (around) 3,000 (years old)
- 4 95%
- 5 (around) 100
- 6 16%

4 a, b, c, g

5 Points that students may mention:

- 1 A large number of languages are spoken by very few people. This might suggest that minority languages will die out.
- 2 These are likely to be older people, rather than younger. Younger children probably do not learn their minority language at school; it may not have a written form; the minority language may not be helpful in terms of job prospects; global communication means that media and the internet tend to use super languages.
- 3 The 'language garden' means a world full of languages: just as the world is currently rich in languages – some more prolific than others, so a garden has a huge mix of colourful flowers. Most people prefer a garden full of a wide range of plants and flowers.
- 4 The growth probably mirrors the growing power of the Chinese economy. School pupils probably consider it a useful language to learn in terms of their job prospects. A good proportion of the learners are also from Chinese families.
- 5 There are thousands of Chinese characters, which computers and phones cannot handle.

6 Students' own answers.

7

grow	increase
about	around
slowly disappear	die out
liken	compare
at risk	in danger
connected	related
dominant	'super'
like	such as

Related websites

The following websites might be useful, for either yourself or your students.

<http://globalgeopolitics.net/wordpress/2010/08/02/china-new-technology-deals-blow-to-writing-mandarin-characters/>

<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE62B0EW20100312>

<http://www.omniglot.com/writing/mandarin.htm#pinyin>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-11210098> (Mandarin in UK schools – includes video)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-11304255> (minority languages - includes video)

http://www.ethnologue.com/ethno_docs/distribution.asp?by=size (statistics on languages)