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Half of Europe's citizens are bilingual

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25 September, 2005

THE ARTICLE

Half of Europe's citizens are bilingual

BNE: Residents of the European Union (EU) are becoming better and better at languages. Almost 50 percent of the EU population say they can speak at least one foreign language very well. That figure rises to nearly 80 percent for students. To celebrate its linguistic diversity, September 26 has become the official European Day of Languages. The day's website shows a Slovak proverb that says: "The number of languages you speak is the number of times you are human". This is to encourage all Europeans to brush up on their language skills.

The results of the "Eurobarometer" survey put Luxembourgers at the top of the language ability list. An amazing 99 percent of Luxembourg's population is at least bilingual. Those with the poorest language skills are the Hungarians (29 percent) and British (30 percent). English is the most widely spoken foreign language, used by more than a third of the population. German (12 percent) is in second place followed by French (11 percent). European enlargement means Russian has risen to fourth place – tied with Spanish. The EU spends \$36 million a year on language programs.

*<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/05/1179&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en#fn1>

WARM-UPS

1. MY ENGLISH: Make a timeline of the history of your English language learning since you started studying. Can you remember your first lesson and teacher? What have been the low points and high points? Are you happy with your current level? In pairs / groups, talk about your histories.

2. MULTILINGUAL: Talk with your partner(s) about which of the following languages you would really like to learn / know and why? Would you like to be fluent or know enough to survive? Would you also like to be able to read and write in these languages?

- German
- French
- Russian
- Spanish
- Chinese
- Arabic
- Korean
- Japanese
- Urdu
- Swahili

3. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

European Union / languages / students / diversity / being bilingual / special days / proverbs / brushing up on skills / German / French / Russian

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

4. ENGLISH: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the English language. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

5. WEAK POINTS: In pairs / groups, talk about your weak points in English. How do these weak points make you feel? What have you done to make these points less weak? How long have you tried to make your weak points stronger? Do they affect your ability to communicate, listen or read?

6. LANGUAGE OPINIONS: Do you agree with these opinions on language? Talk about them with your partner(s).

- a. The number of languages you speak is the number of times you are human.
- b. If the whole world learned English, there'd be fewer communication problems.
- c. To be successful in the world, it's now better to learn Chinese.
- d. English should become the official world language.
- e. The English language is changing many other languages and cultures.
- f. It's the duty of all countries to make citizens bilingual.
- g. There should be just one world language in the future.
- h. My mother tongue is too beautiful to die.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|--|-------|
| a. Europeans are become increasingly better at other languages. | T / F |
| b. Eighty percent of European students are bilingual. | T / F |
| c. September 26 is the official European Day For the English Language. | T / F |
| d. A European proverb says you are not human unless you are bilingual. | T / F |
| e. Ninety-nine percent of Luxembourgers are at least bilingual. | T / F |
| f. Britons are amongst the top of bilingual speakers. | T / F |
| g. French is the most widely spoken foreign language among Europeans. | T / F |
| h. Fewer and fewer Europeans are speaking Russian. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|----------------|------------|
| a. residents | worst |
| b. almost | improve |
| c. figure | expansion |
| d. diversity | equal |
| e. brush up on | nearly |
| f. amazing | annually |
| g. poorest | incredible |
| h. enlargement | citizens |
| i. tied | variety |
| j. a year | number |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| a. Residents | to nearly 80 percent |
| b. are becoming better | enlargement |
| c. That figure rises | diversity |
| d. linguistic | the language ability list |
| e. brush | skills are the Hungarians |
| f. at the top of | up on their language skills |
| g. An amazing | of the European Union |
| h. Those with the poorest language | spoken foreign language |
| i. English is the most widely | and better at languages |
| j. European | 99 percent |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

Half of Europe's citizens are bilingual

BNE: _____ of the European Union (EU) are becoming better and better at languages. Almost 50 percent of the EU population _____ they can speak at least one foreign language very well. That figure _____ to nearly 80 percent for students. To _____ its linguistic diversity, September 26 has become the _____ European Day of Languages. The day's website shows a Slovak _____ that says: "The number of languages you speak is the number of times you are _____". This is to encourage all Europeans to _____ up on their language skills.

The _____ of the "Eurobarometer" survey put Luxembourgers at the top of the language ability _____. An amazing 99 percent of Luxembourg's population is at _____ bilingual. Those with the poorest language _____ are the Hungarians (29 percent) and British (30 percent). English is the most _____ spoken foreign language, used by more than a _____ of the population. German (12 percent) is in second place followed by French (11 percent). European enlargement means Russian has _____ to fourth place – _____ with Spanish. The EU spends \$36 million a year on language programs.

human
celebrate
say
official
brush
residents
proverb
rises
least
risen
list
tied
results
widely
skills
third

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'foreign' and 'language'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the gap fill. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "ENGLISH" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about learning English and other languages.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- | | |
|------------|-----------|
| • becoming | • top |
| • at least | • amazing |
| • rises | • poorest |
| • official | • widely |
| • proverb | • third |
| • brush | • tied |

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. What did you think when you first saw this headline?
- b. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- c. Do you like reading articles about language?
- d. How would you describe your English ability?
- e. What other languages would you like to learn?
- f. Do you agree with the Slovak proverb that says: "The number of languages you speak is the number of times you are human"?
- g. What are your feelings toward your own language?
- h. What are your feelings toward English?
- i. How necessary is English for you?
- j. What do you like most about English?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Are you surprised at anything you read in the article?
- d. Do you think British people have problems because they are not bilingual?
- e. Why is English the most widely spoken foreign language in Europe?
- f. Do you think Chinese will one day become the world's most important foreign language?
- g. Do you think everyone in the world should study English?
- h. What other world languages are important and why?
- i. Do you think the world should learn your language?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What question would you like to ask about this topic?
- b. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- c. Was there a question you didn't like?
- d. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- e. What did you like talking about?
- f. Do you want to know how anyone else answered the questions?
- g. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

STUDY AID: In pairs / groups, give each other advice on how to improve different areas of your English. In the middle column, write down the things you do to help the areas in the left hand column. Tell these to your partner(s). Write down any good ideas you hear in the right column.

LANGUAGE AREAS	THINGS I DO	GOOD IDEAS I HEARD
Spelling		
Pronunciation		
Listening		
Vocabulary		
Speaking		
Grammar		
Writing		

Change partners and tell each other the good ideas you heard. Will you change your study tactics and use these ideas?

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Half of Europe's citizens are bilingual

BNE: Residents of the European Union (EU) are _____ better and better at languages. Almost 50 percent of the EU population say they can speak _____ one foreign language very well. That figure _____ to nearly 80 percent for students. To celebrate its linguistic diversity, September 26 has become the _____ European Day of Languages. The day's website shows a Slovak _____ that says: "The number of languages you speak is the number of times you are _____". This is to encourage all Europeans to _____ up on their language skills.

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HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on the European Day of Languages. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson.

3. MY LANGUAGE: Make a poster about your language. Describe its history, where it's spoken and what it means to you. Show your posters to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

4. LETTER: Write a letter to your government about the amount of money it spends on English language education. Write also about the quality of English language education. Give your government advice on its future language policy. Read your letter to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. T b. T c. F d. F e. T f. F g. F h. F

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|----------------|------------|
| a. residents | citizens |
| b. almost | nearly |
| c. figure | number |
| d. diversity | variety |
| e. brush up on | improve |
| f. amazing | incredible |
| g. poorest | worst |
| h. enlargement | expansion |
| i. tied | equal |
| j. a year | annually |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| a. Residents | of the European Union |
| b. are becoming better | and better at languages |
| c. That figure rises | to nearly 80 percent |
| d. linguistic | diversity |
| e. brush | up on their language skills |
| f. at the top of | the language ability list |
| g. An amazing | 99 percent |
| h. Those with the poorest language | skills are the Hungarians |
| i. English is the most widely | spoken foreign language |
| j. European | enlargement |

GAP FILL:

Half of Europe's citizens are bilingual

BNE: Residents of the European Union (EU) are becoming better and better at languages. Almost 50 percent of the EU population **say** they can speak at least one foreign language very well. That figure **rises** to nearly 80 percent for students. To **celebrate** its linguistic diversity, September 26 has become the **official** European Day of Languages. The day's website shows a Slovak **proverb** that says: "The number of languages you speak is the number of times you are **human**". This is to encourage all Europeans to **brush** up on their language skills.

The **results** of the "Eurobarometer" survey put Luxembourgers at the top of the language ability **list**. An amazing 99 percent of Luxembourg's population is at **least** bilingual. Those with the poorest language **skills** are the Hungarians (29 percent) and British (30 percent). English is the most **widely** spoken foreign language, used by more than a **third** of the population. German (12 percent) is in second place followed by French (11 percent). European enlargement means Russian has **risen** to fourth place – **tied** with Spanish. The EU spends \$36 million a year on language programs.