



Kai L. Chan, PhD

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# POWER LANGUAGE INDEX

**Which are the world's  
most influential languages?**

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There are over 6,000 languages spoken in the world today, but some 2,000 of them count fewer than a thousand speakers. Moreover, just 15 of them account for half of the languages spoken in the world.

- Which are the world's most influential languages?
- What are the proper metrics to measure the reach and power of languages?

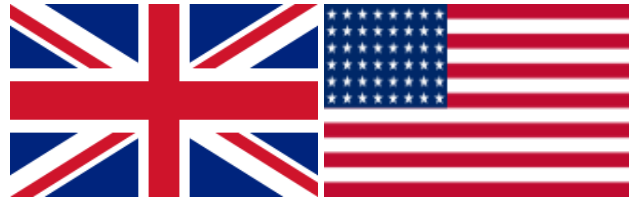
**ENGLISH**

**PLI rank:** 1

**PLI score:** 0.889

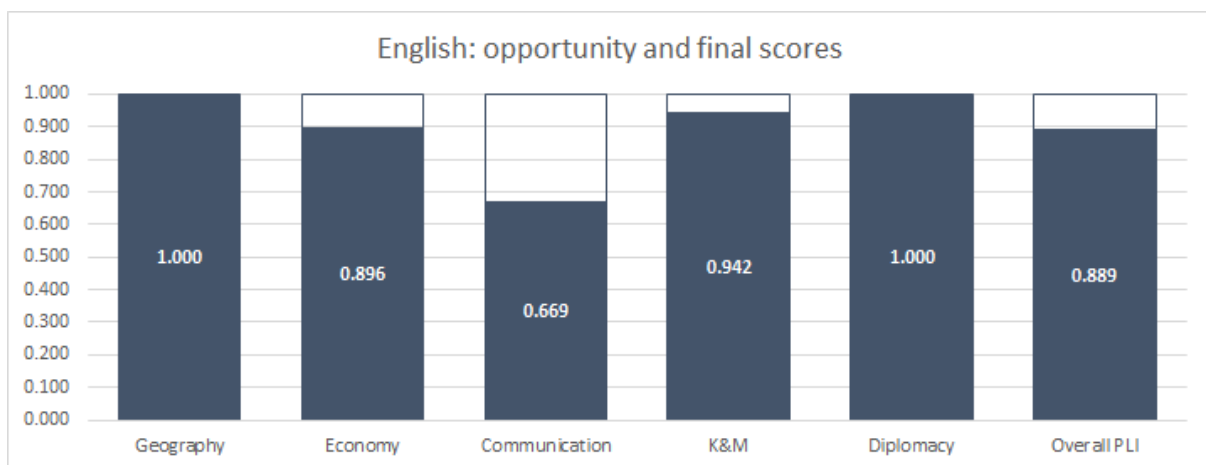
**Language family:** West Germanic

**Geographic coverage:** Global



IND #	INDICATOR	VALUE
<b>1</b>	<b>GEOGRAPHY</b>	
1.1	Countries spoken	42.5
1.2	Land area (mn km <sup>2</sup> )	37.1
1.3	Tourists-in (mn)	202.9
<b>2</b>	<b>ECONOMY</b>	
2.1	PPP GDP (Int\$BN)	31,161
2.2	PPP GDP/cap (Int\$)	17,853
2.3	Exports (\$BN)	4,418
2.4	FX mkt share (%)	117.1
2.5	SDR composition (%)	50.4
<b>3</b>	<b>COMMUNICATION</b>	
3.1	Native speakers (mn)	446
3.2	L2 speakers (mn)	510
3.3	Family size (mn)	115
3.4	Tourists-out (mn)	250.3
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IND #	INDICATOR	VALUE
<b>4</b>	<b>KNOWLEDGE &amp; MEDIA</b>	
4.1	Internet content (%)	55.5
4.2	Feature films	819
4.3	Top-500 universities	237
4.4	Academic journals	5,452
<b>5</b>	<b>DIPLOMACY</b>	
5.1	IMF (indicator)	1
5.2	UN (indicator)	1
5.3	WB (indicator)	1
5.4	Index of 10 SNOs	1.0
OPP #	OPPORTUNITY	RANK
1	Geography	1
2	Economy	1
3	Communication	1
4	Knowledge & media	1
5	Diplomacy	1



English is the world's *lingua franca*. Its dominance as the global means of communication is unrivalled. It is (by the measure of the PLI) more than twice as effective as its nearest rival (Mandarin Chinese). It is the leading language in each of the five opportunities opened by language.

The rise of English as the most important powerful language is spurred by the economic dominance and geographic reach of the English-speaking countries, a legacy of the British Empire that gave rise to many modern-day powerhouse nations. Most notably, the USA is the world's economic, cultural and military superpower, and the UK, along with Canada, are also leading nations (G7) themselves.

The "neutrality" of English has also helped spur its usage and uptake. For example, in both India and Singapore it was chosen to be an official language and means of inter-linguistic communication. The "Englishisation" of cultures at the same time threatens to displace lesser languages.

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**MANDARIN**

**PLI rank:** 2

**PLI score:** 0.411

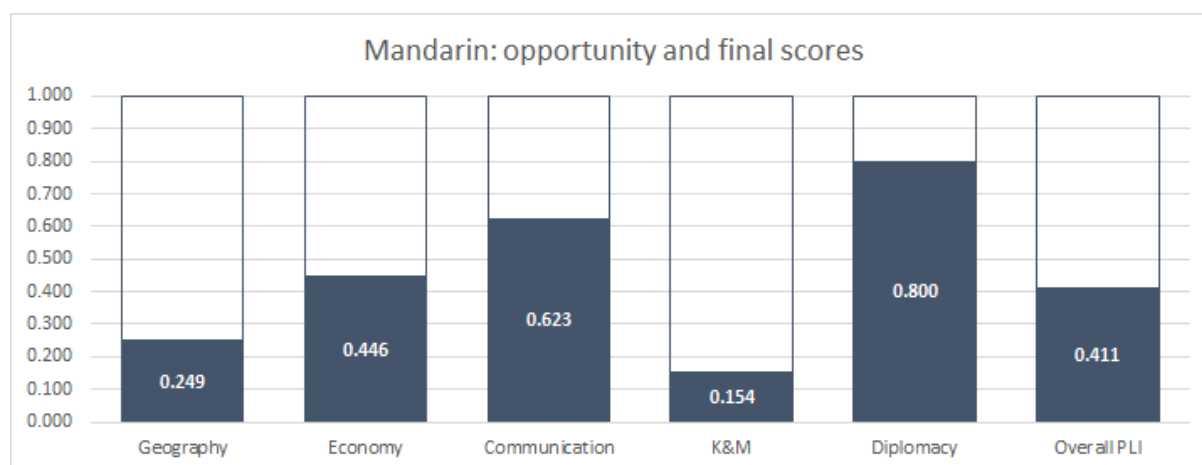
**Language family:** Chinese

**Geographic coverage:** East Asia, Southeast Asia



IND #	INDICATOR	VALUE
<b>1</b>	<b>GEOGRAPHY</b>	
1.1	Countries spoken	3.0
1.2	Land area (mn km <sup>2</sup> )	9.4
1.3	Tourists-in (mn)	84.4
<b>2</b>	<b>ECONOMY</b>	
2.1	PPP GDP (Int\$BN)	19,594
2.2	PPP GDP/cap (Int\$)	13,944
2.3	Exports (\$BN)	3,133
2.4	FX mkt share (%)	2.2
2.5	SDR composition (%)	10.9
<b>3</b>	<b>COMMUNICATION</b>	
3.1	Native speakers (mn)	960
3.2	L2 speakers (mn)	90
3.3	Family size (mn)	408
3.4	Tourists-out (mn)	158.1

IND #	INDICATOR	VALUE
<b>4</b>	<b>KNOWLEDGE &amp; MEDIA</b>	
4.1	Internet content (%)	2.8
4.2	Feature films	584
4.3	Top-500 universities	43
4.4	Academic journals	6
<b>5</b>	<b>DIPLOMACY</b>	
5.1	IMF (indicator)	1
5.2	UN (indicator)	1
5.3	WB (indicator)	1
5.4	Index of 10 SNOs	0.2
OPP #	OPPORTUNITY	RANK
1	Geography	6
2	Economy	2
3	Communication	2
4	Knowledge & media	3
5	Diplomacy	6



Mandarin Chinese is the second most powerful language, just edging out French. Its rise on the global stage is a recent phenomenon. Mandarin was hardly spoken outside of China until recent years; China itself had remained largely outside of the modern global economy until economic reforms were ushered in post-Mao. However, Mandarin remains far behind English, though its prominence is growing. Nevertheless, it is a regional language, with its uptake outside of Greater China limited mostly to the Chinese diaspora and expatriate communities.

There are two modern written forms of Chinese: traditional and simplified. Simplified has been used in China since circa 1950s as part of the Chinese government’s scheme to promote greater literacy. Traditional characters are used in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau. Singapore – where Mandarin was not native – opted to install Mandarin (with simplified Chinese) as its official Chinese language when it was established (to avoid the language politics of competing Chinese languages there).

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**FRENCH**

**PLI rank:** 3

**PLI score:** 0.339

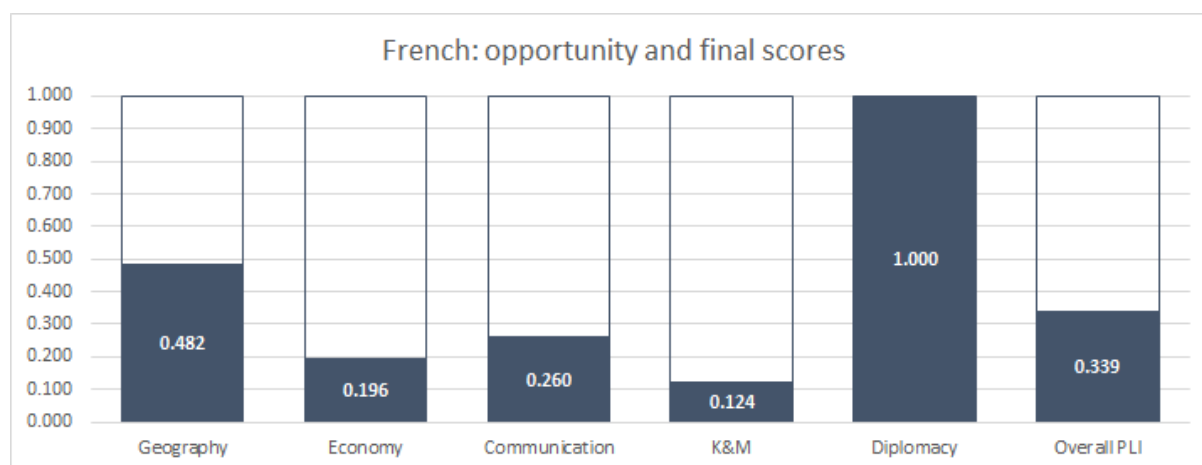
**Language family:** Romance

**Geographic coverage:** Africa, Europe, North America



IND #	INDICATOR	VALUE
<b>1</b>	<b>GEOGRAPHY</b>	
1.1	Countries spoken	24.5
1.2	Land area (mn km <sup>2</sup> )	13.6
1.3	Tourists-in (mn)	125.0
<b>2</b>	<b>ECONOMY</b>	
2.1	PPP GDP (Int\$BN)	4,949
2.2	PPP GDP/cap (Int\$)	12,877
2.3	Exports (\$BN)	1,434
2.4	FX mkt share (%)	7.8
2.5	SDR composition (%)	7.2
<b>3</b>	<b>COMMUNICATION</b>	
3.1	Native speakers (mn)	80
3.2	L2 speakers (mn)	140
3.3	Family size (mn)	773
3.4	Tourists-out (mn)	68.9

IND #	INDICATOR	VALUE
<b>4</b>	<b>KNOWLEDGE &amp; MEDIA</b>	
4.1	Internet content (%)	4.0
4.2	Feature films	272
4.3	Top-500 universities	44
4.4	Academic journals	76
<b>5</b>	<b>DIPLOMACY</b>	
5.1	IMF (indicator)	1
5.2	UN (indicator)	1
5.3	WB (indicator)	1
5.4	Index of 10 SNOs	1.0
OPP #	OPPORTUNITY	RANK
1	Geography	2
2	Economy	6
3	Communication	5
4	Knowledge & media	5
5	Diplomacy	1



French is the third most powerful language, buttressed by its strong standing in diplomatic circles. Indeed, French retains an air of sophistication and is the go-to second language people acquire when they wish to appear educated or sophisticated. The language of De Gaulle holds official status at most major international organizations (and all tracked in the PLI), even if English happens to be the *de facto* working tongue. Nevertheless, where English and French once vied against each other to be the global *lingua franca*, French has clearly slipped behind its cross-Channel rival.

French punches above its weight relative to its small base of native speakers. The language counts just 80 million speakers, the smallest of any of the top-10 languages. But the power of French can be seen in its high number of L2 speakers (trailing only English and Arabic). Indeed, French is the *lingua franca* or the language of the elite in many African nations even if it is not the mother tongue of the population at large.

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**SPANISH**

**PLI rank:** 4

**PLI score:** 0.330

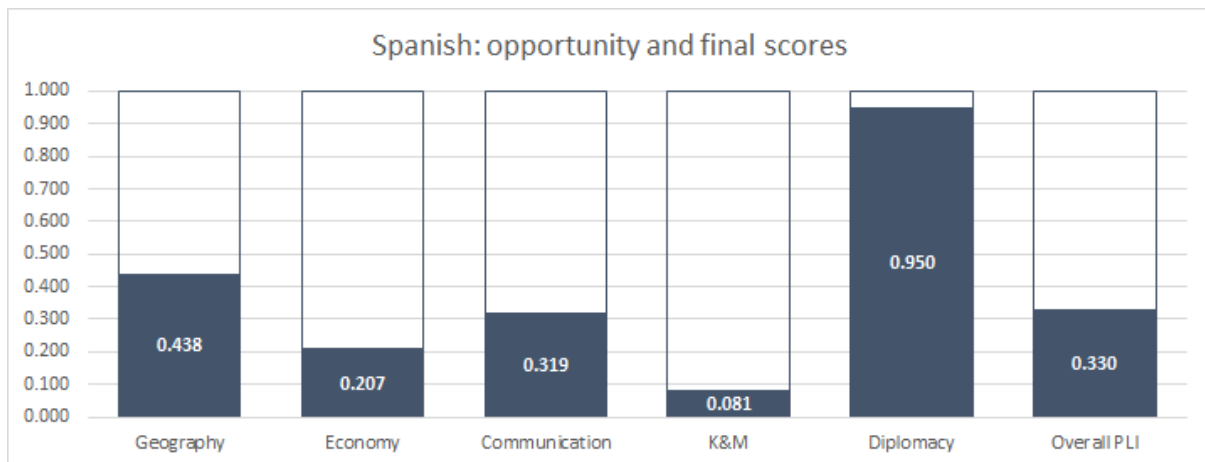
**Language family:** Romance

**Geographic coverage:** Europe, Latin America



IND #	INDICATOR	VALUE
<b>1</b>	<b>GEOGRAPHY</b>	
1.1	Countries spoken	21.0
1.2	Land area (mn km <sup>2</sup> )	12.1
1.3	Tourists-in (mn)	123.5
<b>2</b>	<b>ECONOMY</b>	
2.1	PPP GDP (Int\$BN)	7,813
2.2	PPP GDP/cap (Int\$)	17,438
2.3	Exports (\$BN)	1,265
2.4	FX mkt share (%)	6.0
2.5	SDR composition (%)	3.2
<b>3</b>	<b>COMMUNICATION</b>	
3.1	Native speakers (mn)	470
3.2	L2 speakers (mn)	90
3.3	Family size (mn)	383
3.4	Tourists-out (mn)	59.4

IND #	INDICATOR	VALUE
<b>4</b>	<b>KNOWLEDGE &amp; MEDIA</b>	
4.1	Internet content (%)	4.6
4.2	Feature films	219
4.3	Top-500 universities	17
4.4	Academic journals	28
<b>5</b>	<b>DIPLOMACY</b>	
5.1	IMF (indicator)	1
5.2	UN (indicator)	1
5.3	WB (indicator)	1
5.4	Index of 10 SNOs	0.8
OPP #	OPPORTUNITY	RANK
1	Geography	3
2	Economy	5
3	Communication	3
4	Knowledge & media	7
5	Diplomacy	3



Spanish places just behind French, but its trajectory going forward may soon have it eclipse its Romance-language rival as Latin America grows. In terms of number of native speakers it trails just Mandarin. On the global diplomatic stage it trails just English and French in facilitating global communication. Nevertheless, its global reach is limited by its geography as it is spoken only in Europe and Latin America.

Amongst the five opportunities Spanish fares worst on Knowledge & Media. But this is more an artefact of the dominance of English in this sphere rather than shortcomings, per se, of the Spanish language. Nevertheless, the quality of intuitions of higher learning – and ergo the research and knowledge they embody – in the Spanish-speaking world lag that of those with English, French or German roots.

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**ARABIC**

**PLI rank:** 5

**PLI score:** 0.273

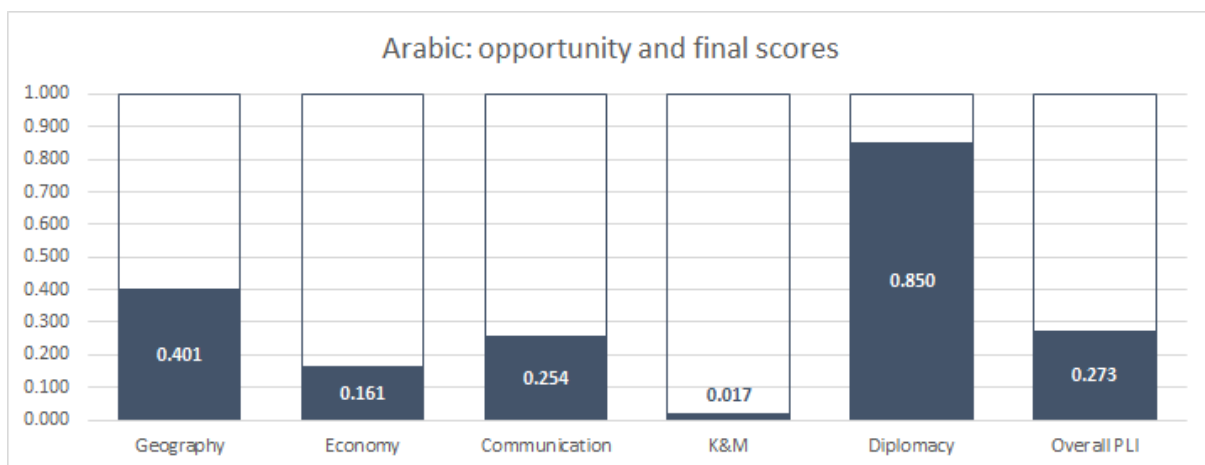
**Language family:** Semitic

**Geographic coverage:** Middle East North Africa (MENA)



IND #	INDICATOR	VALUE
<b>1</b>	<b>GEOGRAPHY</b>	
1.1	Countries spoken	20.5
1.2	Land area (mn km <sup>2</sup> )	13.9
1.3	Tourists-in (mn)	76.1
<b>2</b>	<b>ECONOMY</b>	
2.1	PPP GDP (Int\$BN)	5,973
2.2	PPP GDP/cap (Int\$)	14,916
2.3	Exports (\$BN)	1,142
2.4	FX mkt share (%)	0.0
2.5	SDR composition (%)	0.0
<b>3</b>	<b>COMMUNICATION</b>	
3.1	Native speakers (mn)	295
3.2	L2 speakers (mn)	250
3.3	Family size (mn)	37
3.4	Tourists-out (mn)	49.2

IND #	INDICATOR	VALUE
<b>4</b>	<b>KNOWLEDGE &amp; MEDIA</b>	
4.1	Internet content (%)	0.8
4.2	Feature films	5
4.3	Top-500 universities	9
4.4	Academic journals	0
<b>5</b>	<b>DIPLOMACY</b>	
5.1	IMF (indicator)	1
5.2	UN (indicator)	1
5.3	WB (indicator)	1
5.4	Index of 10 SNOs	0.4
OPP #	OPPORTUNITY	RANK
1	Geography	4
2	Economy	9
3	Communication	6
4	Knowledge & media	18
5	Diplomacy	4



Arabic is the fifth most powerful language. It is spoken primarily in Middle East North Africa (MENA), but its status as the language of the Quran compels many Muslims worldwide to study it. For this reason, it counts 250 million L2 speakers, second only to English. The strength of Arabic is also supported by the prosperous economies of oil-rich Arab nations, a phenomenon that may retreat as the price of oil has fallen sharply since peaking in 2014.

Amongst the top-10 languages, Arabic is the laggard in the Knowledge & Media opportunity, and primarily on the aspect of Knowledge. Modern higher education and research are still nascent in the region, and the political and cultural climates currently are not as conducive to the modern research university. Colonial legacy has also given rise to French (and in modern time to English) as the prestige language in some Arabic countries.

**RUSSIAN**

**PLI rank:** 6

**PLI score:** 0.244

**Language family:** Slavic

**Geographic coverage:** Central Asia, East Europe



IND #	INDICATOR	VALUE
<b>1</b>	<b>GEOGRAPHY</b>	
1.1	Countries spoken	5.0
1.2	Land area (mn km <sup>2</sup> )	20.4
1.3	Tourists-in (mn)	40.7
<b>2</b>	<b>ECONOMY</b>	
2.1	PPP GDP (Int\$BN)	4,146
2.2	PPP GDP/cap (Int\$)	21,522
2.3	Exports (\$BN)	601
2.4	FX mkt share (%)	1.6
2.5	SDR composition (%)	0.0
<b>3</b>	<b>COMMUNICATION</b>	
3.1	Native speakers (mn)	150
3.2	L2 speakers (mn)	110
3.3	Family size (mn)	125
3.4	Tourists-out (mn)	59.1

IND #	INDICATOR	VALUE
<b>4</b>	<b>KNOWLEDGE &amp; MEDIA</b>	
4.1	Internet content (%)	5.9
4.2	Feature films	140
4.3	Top-500 universities	2
4.4	Academic journals	27
<b>5</b>	<b>DIPLOMACY</b>	
5.1	IMF (indicator)	1
5.2	UN (indicator)	1
5.3	WB (indicator)	1
5.4	Index of 10 SNOs	0.3
OPP #	OPPORTUNITY	RANK
1	Geography	5
2	Economy	12
3	Communication	10
4	Knowledge & media	9
5	Diplomacy	5



Russian is the primary language of Russia, but is also widely spoken in many of the former Soviet states (and satellite states), where large Russian diaspora communities also exist. In spite of recent economic and political shocks, Russia remains a globally important nation (nuclear power, UN Security Council permanent member, etc.) and the vast geography of the nation (and its resource riches) give it a good foundation to grow (notwithstanding political issues).

Russian uses the Cyrillic alphabet, in contrast to the other influential European languages which use the Latin script. Soviet legacy has expanded the use of Cyrillic, where it is the form of writing in Kazakh and Mongolian amongst other places. Nevertheless, there is a push in some of these nations now to adapt the Latin script and even within Russia.

**GERMAN**

PLI rank: 7

PLI score: 0.192

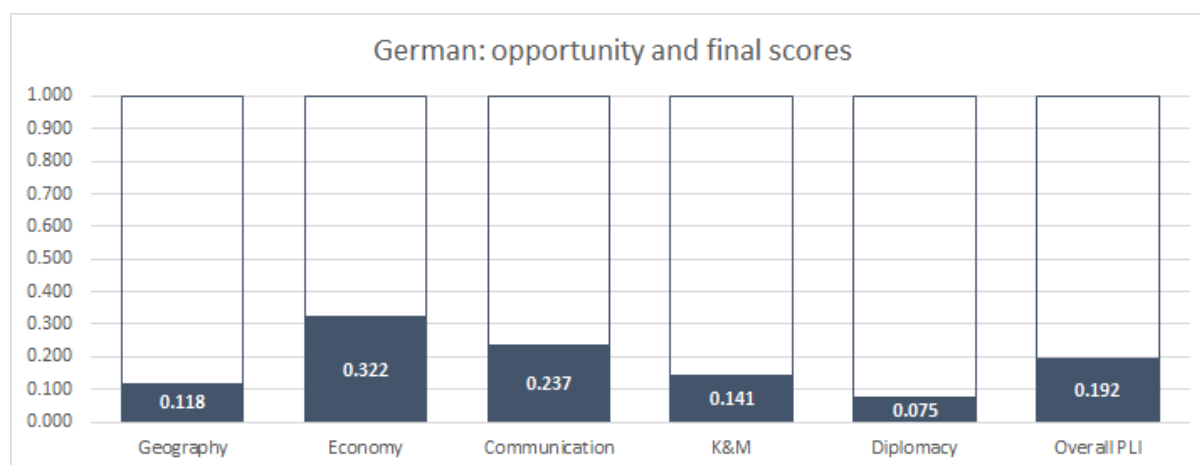
Language family: West Germanic

Geographic coverage: West Europe



IND #	INDICATOR	VALUE
<b>1</b>	<b>GEOGRAPHY</b>	
1.1	Countries spoken	5.0
1.2	Land area (mn km <sup>2</sup> )	0.5
1.3	Tourists-in (mn)	66.3
<b>2</b>	<b>ECONOMY</b>	
2.1	PPP GDP (Int\$BN)	4,675
2.2	PPP GDP/cap (Int\$)	47,192
2.3	Exports (\$BN)	2,007
2.4	FX mkt share (%)	16.0
2.5	SDR composition (%)	10.0
<b>3</b>	<b>COMMUNICATION</b>	
3.1	Native speakers (mn)	93
3.2	L2 speakers (mn)	13
3.3	Family size (mn)	468
3.4	Tourists-out (mn)	107.9

IND #	INDICATOR	VALUE
<b>4</b>	<b>KNOWLEDGE &amp; MEDIA</b>	
4.1	Internet content (%)	5.8
4.2	Feature films	212
4.3	Top-500 universities	54
4.4	Academic journals	67
<b>5</b>	<b>DIPLOMACY</b>	
5.1	IMF (indicator)	0
5.2	UN (indicator)	0
5.3	WB (indicator)	0
5.4	Index of 10 SNOs	0.3
OPP #	OPPORTUNITY	RANK
1	Geography	8
2	Economy	3
3	Communication	7
4	Knowledge & media	4
5	Diplomacy	8



German places seventh on the PLI on the strength of the German-speaking economies. Indeed, the per capita wealth of German-speaking nations (\$47,192) is the highest amongst all language groups. But the influence of the German language is limited by its small geographic coverage, being spoken (in large numbers) only in West Europe. Nevertheless, the prominence of German may rise as post-Brexit EU will see less influence of UK (and ergo English language) culture on the Continent.

The influence of German is in some ways largely self-imposed, as German speakers seldom “force” the language on foreigners (in contrast to French speakers). Indeed, in many professional settings Germans will switch to English to accommodate even the presence of one non-German speaker in the group. This phenomenon is largely a consequence of Germany’s war past and the occupation of the country by Allied (especially American) forces.



**JAPANESE**

**PLI rank:** 8

**PLI score:** 0.133

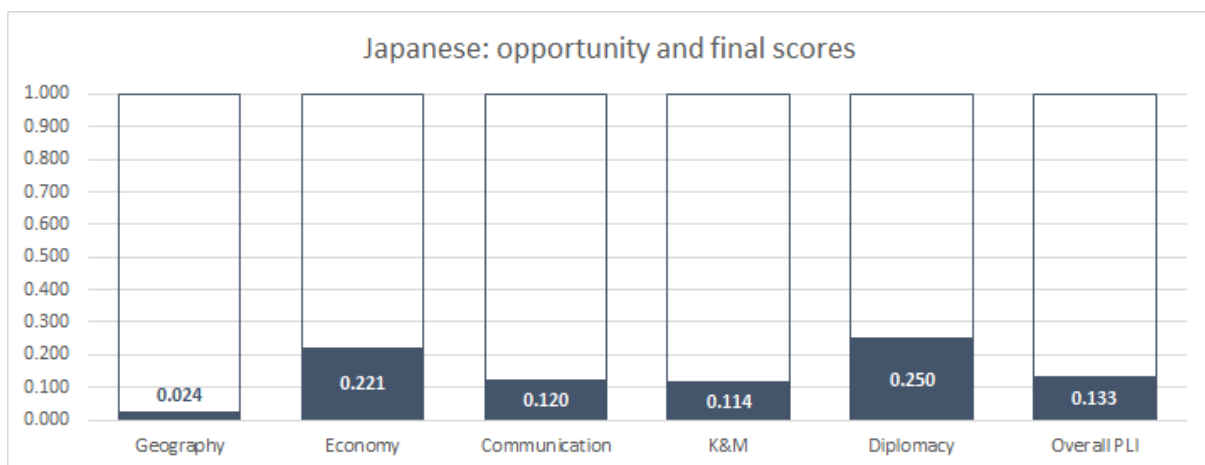
**Language family:** Japonic

**Geographic coverage:** Japan



IND #	INDICATOR	VALUE
<b>1</b>	<b>GEOGRAPHY</b>	
1.1	Countries spoken	1.0
1.2	Land area (mn km <sup>2</sup> )	0.4
1.3	Tourists-in (mn)	10.4
<b>2</b>	<b>ECONOMY</b>	
2.1	PPP GDP (Int\$BN)	4,768
2.2	PPP GDP/cap (Int\$)	37,593
2.3	Exports (\$BN)	700
2.4	FX mkt share (%)	23.0
2.5	SDR composition (%)	8.3
<b>3</b>	<b>COMMUNICATION</b>	
3.1	Native speakers (mn)	125
3.2	L2 speakers (mn)	0
3.3	Family size (mn)	442
3.4	Tourists-out (mn)	16.9

IND #	INDICATOR	VALUE
<b>4</b>	<b>KNOWLEDGE &amp; MEDIA</b>	
4.1	Internet content (%)	5.0
4.2	Feature films	441
4.3	Top-500 universities	18
4.4	Academic journals	9
<b>5</b>	<b>DIPLOMACY</b>	
5.1	IMF (indicator)	1
5.2	UN (indicator)	0
5.3	WB (indicator)	0
5.4	Index of 10 SNOs	0.0
OPP #	OPPORTUNITY	RANK
1	Geography	27
2	Economy	4
3	Communication	22
4	Knowledge & media	6
5	Diplomacy	7



Japanese is the most isolated of the top-10 languages. It is spoken in just one country, which is itself an (isolated) island nation. The complexity of the language (for most foreign learners) – it uses three writing systems ((*katakana*, *hiragana* and *kanji*) as well as the Latin alphabet for transliterations – has limited the uptake of the language as a second language. Nevertheless, the popularity of Japanese popular culture, especially with respect to *anime*, has nevertheless gained it a sizeable number of students studying the language.

Declining birth rates and lack of immigration in the country will see a sharp drop in the population of Japan over the next century. Combined with the economic stagnation of the economy, these suggest that the influence of the Japanese language will wane over time. However, as the strength of (Mandarin) Chinese grows there may be scope for Japanese to leverage its strength – *kanji* are Chinese characters used in Japanese (albeit not necessarily with the same meaning).

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**PORTUGUESE**

PLI rank: 10

PLI score: 0.118

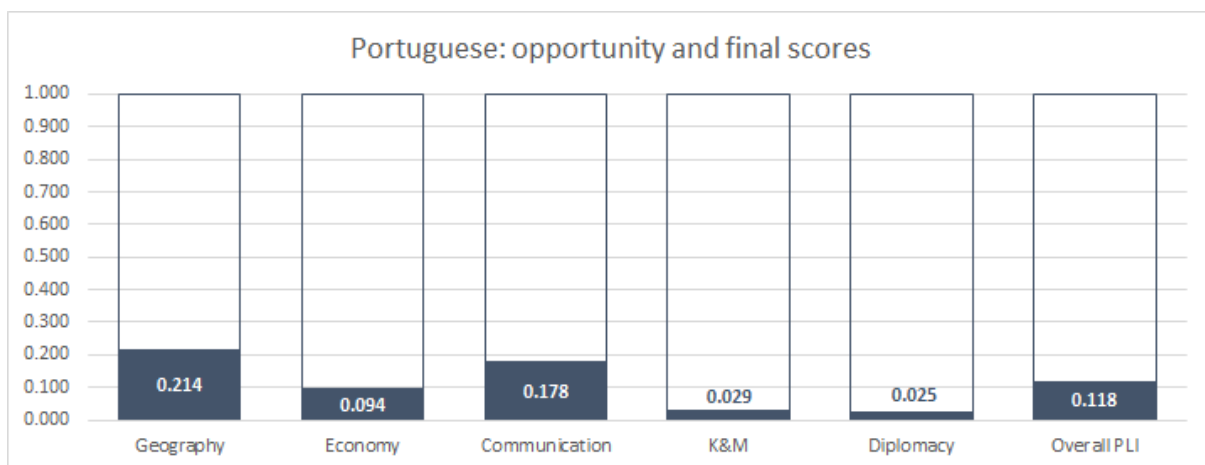
Language family: Romance

Geographic coverage: Africa, Europe, LatAm



IND #	INDICATOR	VALUE
<b>1</b>	<b>GEOGRAPHY</b>	
1.1	Countries spoken	8.0
1.2	Land area (mn km <sup>2</sup> )	10.7
1.3	Tourists-in (mn)	18.2
<b>2</b>	<b>ECONOMY</b>	
2.1	PPP GDP (Int\$BN)	3,790
2.2	PPP GDP/cap (Int\$)	14,056
2.3	Exports (\$BN)	390
2.4	FX mkt share (%)	1.7
2.5	SDR composition (%)	0.5
<b>3</b>	<b>COMMUNICATION</b>	
3.1	Native speakers (mn)	215
3.2	L2 speakers (mn)	35
3.3	Family size (mn)	638
3.4	Tourists-out (mn)	10.4

IND #	INDICATOR	VALUE
<b>4</b>	<b>KNOWLEDGE &amp; MEDIA</b>	
4.1	Internet content (%)	2.5
4.2	Feature films	9
4.3	Top-500 universities	9
4.4	Academic journals	9
<b>5</b>	<b>DIPLOMACY</b>	
5.1	IMF (indicator)	0
5.2	UN (indicator)	0
5.3	WB (indicator)	0
5.4	Index of 10 SNOs	0.1
OPP #	OPPORTUNITY	RANK
1	Geography	7
2	Economy	19
3	Communication	13
4	Knowledge & media	12
5	Diplomacy	9



Along with English, the Portuguese language is now more prominent outside of its historic homeland (Portugal). The diversity of its geography is second only to English: Portuguese is spoken on four continents. Portuguese is also a close cousin of Spanish (and it is claimed that Portuguese speakers are better able to understand Spanish than vice versa), so Portuguese speakers will also gain in a world where the prominence of Spanish grows.

The trajectory of Portuguese hinges a lot on the fate and success of Brazil, a so-called “BRIC” nation. The re-emergence of Portuguese in East Timor is one of the few exceptions going against the “Englishisation” phenomenon. Indeed, When East Timor gained independence it came as a bit of a surprise as English and/or Indonesian seemed like more logical choices to promote as official languages.

**HINDI**

**PLI rank:** 9

**PLI score:** 0.117

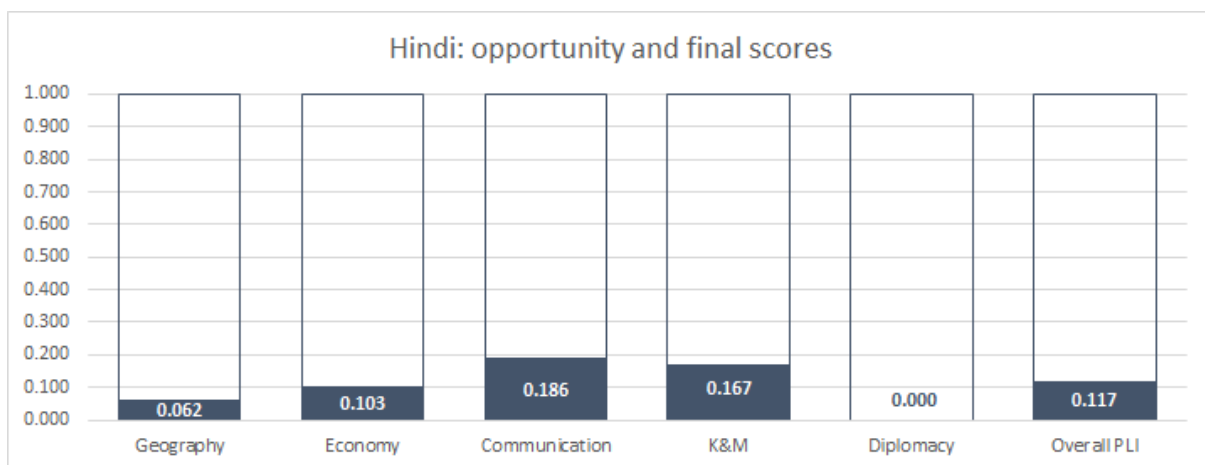
**Language family:** Indo-Aryan

**Geographic coverage:** South Asia



IND #	INDICATOR	VALUE
<b>1</b>	<b>GEOGRAPHY</b>	
1.1	Countries spoken	1.5
1.2	Land area (mn km <sup>2</sup> )	3,297
1.3	Tourists-in (mn)	7.3
<b>2</b>	<b>ECONOMY</b>	
2.1	PPP GDP (Int\$BN)	7,415
2.2	PPP GDP/cap (Int\$)	5,766
2.3	Exports (\$BN)	330
2.4	FX mkt share (%)	1.0
2.5	SDR composition (%)	0.0
<b>3</b>	<b>COMMUNICATION</b>	
3.1	Native speakers (mn)	310
3.2	L2 speakers (mn)	120
3.3	Family size (mn)	122
3.4	Tourists-out (mn)	18.4

IND #	INDICATOR	VALUE
<b>4</b>	<b>KNOWLEDGE &amp; MEDIA</b>	
4.1	Internet content (%)	0.0
4.2	Feature films	1,255
4.3	Top-500 universities	0
4.4	Academic journals	0
<b>5</b>	<b>DIPLOMACY</b>	
5.1	IMF (indicator)	0
5.2	UN (indicator)	0
5.3	WB (indicator)	0
5.4	Index of 10 SNOs	0.0
OPP #	OPPORTUNITY	RANK
1	Geography	13
2	Economy	16
3	Communication	8
4	Knowledge & media	2
5	Diplomacy	10



Hindi is the dominant language of India, but India is also home to hundreds of other languages. This has given rise to a situation whereby the influence of Hindi has been limited as the government of India needs to placate the concerns of competing languages. Indeed, Hindi punches well below its weight (in contrast to French) relative to its number of native speakers (310 million).

The language politics of India have limited the ability of the country to promote its most prolific native language. Indeed, competition across the various linguistic factions in India (and the history of English colonialism) has helped spur the rise of English in India (and globally). With no internal push from India to promote the use of Hindi, either within the country or internationally, the language remains low on the international radar in spite of it being the dominant language of the world's second most populous nation and third largest economy (PPP).

**KAZAKH**

PLI rank: 0.033

PLI score: 34

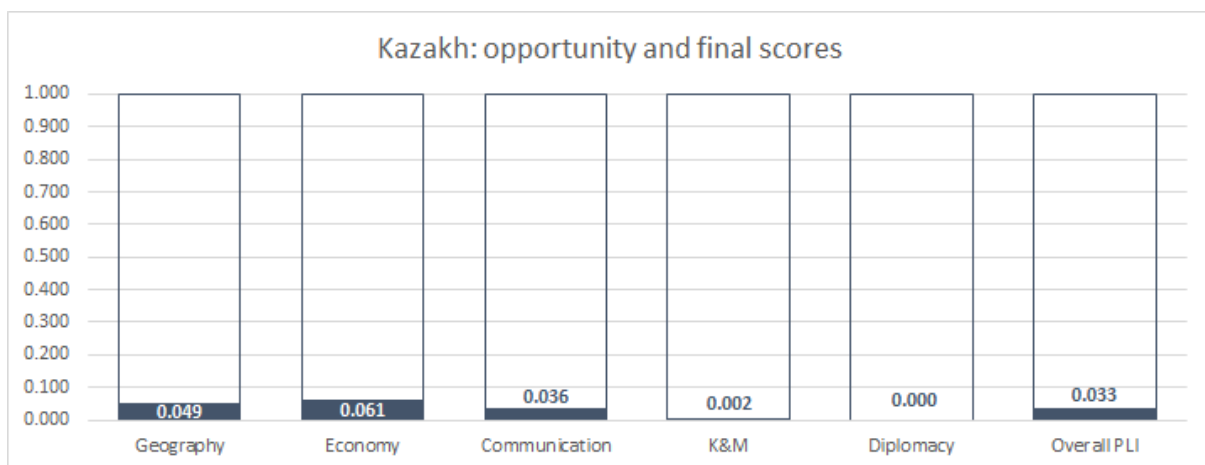
Language family: Turkic

Geographic coverage: Kazakhstan



IND #	INDICATOR	VALUE
<b>1</b>	<b>GEOGRAPHY</b>	
1.1	Countries spoken	1.0
1.2	Land area (mn km <sup>2</sup> )	2.7
1.3	Tourists-in (mn)	4.9
<b>2</b>	<b>ECONOMY</b>	
2.1	PPP GDP (Int\$BN)	420
2.2	PPP GDP/cap (Int\$)	23,768
2.3	Exports (\$BN)	87
2.4	FX mkt share (%)	0.0
2.5	SDR composition (%)	0.0
<b>3</b>	<b>COMMUNICATION</b>	
3.1	Native speakers (mn)	11
3.2	L2 speakers (mn)	0
3.3	Family size (mn)	151
3.4	Tourists-out (mn)	10.2

IND #	INDICATOR	VALUE
<b>4</b>	<b>KNOWLEDGE &amp; MEDIA</b>	
4.1	Internet content (%)	0.0
4.2	Feature films	12
4.3	Top-500 universities	0
4.4	Academic journals	0
<b>5</b>	<b>DIPLOMACY</b>	
5.1	IMF (indicator)	0
5.2	UN (indicator)	0
5.3	WB (indicator)	0
5.4	Index of 10 SNOs	0.0
OPP #	OPPORTUNITY	RANK
1	Geography	15
2	Economy	32
3	Communication	57
4	Knowledge & media	56
5	Diplomacy	10



Although Kazakh speakers can be found throughout Central Asia, it is essentially only spoken in great numbers in Kazakhstan. Although its roots are as a Turkic language, Soviet legacy has made the Cyrillic alphabet the current means of writing the language. Nevertheless, there are ambitions by some to switch to the use of the Latin alphabet. But the existence of Russian, which uses Cyrillic script, as a second official language in Kazakhstan may counter any such push.

The Kazakh language ranks 34 in the PLI. The vast geography of the country, and its strategic position between China and Russia, suggest bright economic prospects for the country. With only 11 million native speakers it will invariably remain a local language (for the foreseeable future) – although the population of speakers has not limited other languages over the course of history from functioning as a *lingua franca*. Nevertheless, it behooves Kazakh speakers to take up a more powerful second language to help them navigate the global economy.

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