English as a global language
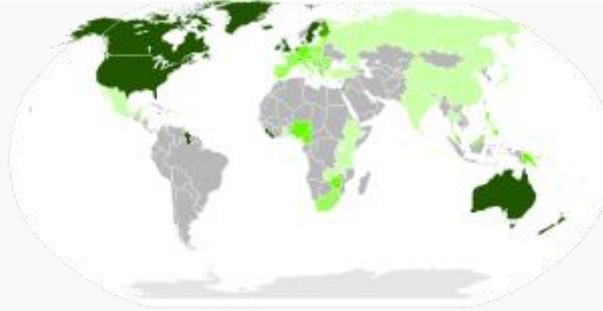
Percent of national populations with knowledge of English

■ 80–100%

■ 60–80%

■ 40–60%

▯ 20–40%

▯ 0–20%

Because English is so widely spoken, it has often been referred to as a "world language", the *lingua franca* of the modern era, and while it is not an official language in most countries, it is currently the language most often taught as a foreign language. It is, by international treaty, the official language for aeronautical and maritime communications. English is one of the official languages of the United Nations and many other international organisations, including the International Olympic Committee.

English is studied most often in the European Union, and the perception of the usefulness of foreign languages among Europeans is 67% in favour of English ahead of 17% for German and 16% for French (as of 2012). Among some of the non-English-speaking EU countries, the following percentages of the adult population claimed to be able to converse in English in 2012: 90% in the Netherlands, 89% in Malta, 86% in Sweden and Denmark, 73% in Cyprus and Austria, 70% in Finland, and over 50% in Greece, Luxembourg, Slovenia and Germany. In 2012, excluding native speakers, 38% of Europeans consider that they can speak English, but only 3% of Japanese people.

Books, magazines, and newspapers written in English are available in many countries around the world, and English is the most commonly used language in the sciences with Science Citation Index reporting as early as 1997 that 95% of its articles were written in English, even though only half of them came from authors in English-speaking countries.

English literature predominates considerably with 28% of all volumes published in the world [leclerc 2011] and 30% of web content in 2011 (from 50% in 2000).

This increasing use of the English language globally has had a large impact on many other languages, leading to language shift and even language death, and to claims of linguistic imperialism. English itself has become more open to language shift as multiple regional varieties feed back into the language as a whole.