

18100 Post Brexit, it might be time to resurrect foreign languages in the UK

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Post-Brexit, only two EU countries (Ireland and Malta) will have English as their official language. Despite this, it's unlikely to lose its importance.

English is the global language – not just in terms of the number of speakers, but because of its global reach. It's the language of the internet, fashion and the entertainment industry.

But could this be changing? Perhaps - with Britain no longer a central part of Europe, it might be time to resurrect other languages and give them higher status. It might even be enough to start reversing the decline in language studies at UK universities.

It's all quite a challenge for the monolingual Brit. So what language should we learn?

German? Everyone should speak German in Europe because Angela Merkel runs the EU, right? Well, perhaps. Very long words make learning vocabulary pretty scary. But its similarities with English mean it's easier than it looks. Since English is also a Germanic language, some of the vocabulary is relatively easy to learn. Is it worth learning, though? Deciding which language to learn is generally based on how many people in the world speak it or how useful it is for tourist purposes. But there are some languages that are just useful, and German is one them. In business terms, German is extremely important.

Or what about Mandarin? Chinese languages are tonal: the tone you give a word changes its meaning. It's something that English speakers are not familiar with.

Success in language learning depends on motivation and the amount of exposure (which is why Europeans tend to be good at English). If languages are well taught and students have a clear motivation for learning them, then they will manage to learn.

Unlike Mandarin, which is spoken by a lot of people but is confined to one region, Spanish has gone global. You could survive just speaking English on a trip to Ibiza, but you might struggle travelling in South America. Spanish is also one of the easier languages to learn. It has been rising over the last decade or two, and is now taught almost as widely as French.

The French would love it if we all started learning their language. But how important is it really? In the EU bureaucracy, French is still very important; and it is also important in certain regions – West Africa for example. There are lots of reasons for Brits to learn French properly. Given its usefulness and prestige, French scores highly and continues to be the second-most taught language in the world.