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## About Arbiters and Languages...

Human language is estimated to have developed some 100,000 years ago and, in the present day, is characterised by its enormous formal diversity: every country has its own languages and dialects. Just about all cultures have developed writing systems that make it possible to record spoken language. We use language to communicate.

Language is used to share our experiences with the world around us. Those 'others' can be people in your immediate environment but also people from other countries, communities and cultures. There are between 6,000 and 7,000 languages in the world, spoken by 8 billion people in 196 different countries.

In Europe alone, there are about 225 indigenous languages, about 3% of the total number of languages in the world. According to statistics, the 3 most widely spoken languages are Mandarin Chinese (1,248 million people); Spanish (437 million people) and English (372 million people). Further down the ranking are Hindi (at 4), Arabic (at 5), Portuguese (at 6) and Bengali (at 7). Note that Russian only comes in 8th place and French, for example, is not even in the top 10.

*So how does this affect international chess?* If one common language was spoken by the vast majority of people in the international chess world, the life of an arbiter would be so much easier. However, perhaps this is a utopia.

How about FIDE according to languages? FIDE was founded 100 years ago under the motto 'Gens una sumus': We are one family! There is no doubt that, in that one family, proper communication is very important. FIDE recognises the following languages as official languages: English and French. There are also the official conference languages: Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Arabic and German. English is considered the most widely spoken language in FIDE.

And in practice? I am now looking at this mainly from the arbiters point of view. Logically, it should be obvious for every arbiter to speak English since, as already stated, English is the most widely spoken language within FIDE.

For this reason, an arbiter should be able to smoothly solve any problem that arises between non-native speakers during a tournament. Mastering the English language should therefore be an absolute must for an arbiter. Unfortunately, this is not so easy in practice.

As I write this here, I am working as deputy chief arbiter at the World School Chess Championship in Peru. I consider myself to be fluent in English.

However, I note that the vast majority of the participants (young children) during this championship do not speak English at all but Spanish, as do the majority of the national arbiters appointed by the organisation. As a result, with my 'advanced' level of English, I almost always have to rely on someone speaking Spanish when a participant asks for my help.

Virtually the same situation some years ago during a tournament in Minsk (Belarus) where I was sector arbiter. A large part of the participants spoke only Russian, as did the appointed arbiters. This obviously meant that communicating with the participants and even with the local arbiter was sometimes very difficult.

Is it therefore expedient to state that every FA or IA should be compulsorily proficient in English? Is it logical to impose this on all FAs and IAs? Many believe that it should be mandatory for an FA or IA to have at least a basic knowledge of English, along with basic knowledge of one of the FIDE congress languages. However, the implication is that this would exclude a lot of FAs and IAs from a designation during, for instance, an Olympiad. The truth will probably lie somewhere in the middle.

I think that a solution to this language problem will not be easy, assuming that a solution would be possible. In my opinion, this is a major challenge for those who have been designated by the policy bodies in international chess as chairman, secretary, councillor or member in the various arbiters committees.

Finally, if anyone would like to express their opinion about this subject, please do not hesitate to contact the ECU Arbiters Council.

### ECU Arbiters Council

The ECU Arbiters Council publishes monthly articles in the ECU Magazine about its activities.

Detailed information can be found on the official website: [arbiters.europechess.org](http://arbiters.europechess.org)