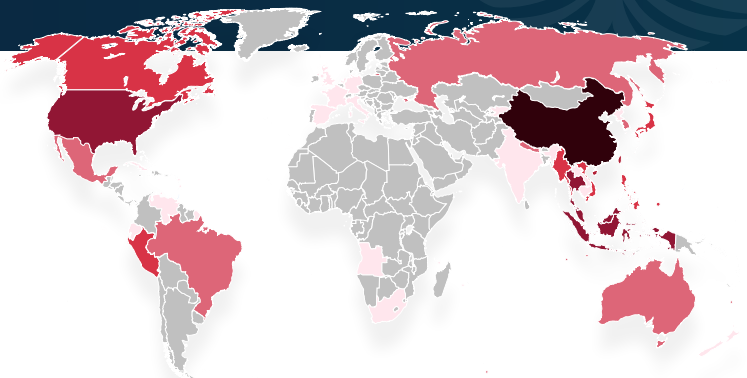


MANDARIN *at a Glance*

A Comparative Linguistic Analysis for Classroom Teachers

HELPFUL INFORMATION

- ▶ There are many dialects of Chinese, and Mandarin is the **most widely spoken** of these dialects. Other dialects include **Cantonese, Wu,** and **Min**.
- ▶ Mandarin is the world's **second most spoken language**, following English.
- ▶ Mandarin is a **tonal** language in which the pitch pattern of the voice indicates **meaning**.
- ▶ There are **four** primary tones— level, rising, falling then rising, and falling.



- Countries identified Chinese as a primary, administrative, or native language
- Countries with more than 5 million Chinese speakers
- Countries with more than 1 million Chinese speakers
- Countries with more than 500,000 Chinese speakers
- Countries with more than 100,000 Chinese speakers

COMPARISONS AND COMMON DIFFICULTIES BETWEEN MANDARIN AND ENGLISH

CHARACTERS, NOT LETTERS



There is no alphabet in Mandarin Chinese. Instead, there are thousands of unique characters. Mandarin can be transcribed into English sound characters using a system called pinyin but, Mandarin characters are visual in nature. Words are not made up of letter sounds; each word is a character.

PRONUNCIATION



Many speakers of Mandarin struggle with consonant sounds at the end of words because there are no equivalent ending sounds in Mandarin. In addition, certain consonants like “l” and “r” are challenging because there is no equivalent sound.

NO PLURALS / NO VERB TENSES



In Mandarin, nouns don't change to indicate plurals. Additionally, the concept of time is not handled through the use of different tenses and verb forms as it is in English, rather, an adverb is linked with a verb to express when the action took place.



ARTICLES

There are no articles in Mandarin. Therefore, students might struggle to distinguish “a” and “the.”

EXAMPLES AND TEACHING STRATEGIES

LINGUISTIC ELEMENT	EXAMPLES	TEACHING STRATEGIES
CHARACTERS	There is no Mandarin alphabet, instead characters are used. A character may represent a word, a morpheme in compound word, or just a simple syllable combined with some other syllables or characters to form a morpheme.	Spend time building phonemic awareness . Be sure students understand the relationships between letters (graphemes) and the sounds (phonemes) they represent in English.
PRONUNCIATION	Certain consonants like “l” and “r” are challenging because there is no equivalent sound in Mandarin. English also has more vowel sounds than Mandarin, so students might struggle to distinguish between “set,” “seat,” “sit,” and “site.”	Provide ample opportunities to practice difficult sounds in low pressure situations . Celebrate students’ accents as a sign of bravery!
NO PLURALS	In English one might say, “I have five sisters .” However, in Mandarin, one would say the equivalent of “I have five sister.”	Explicitly teach the rules about forming plurals in English.
NO VERB TENSES	In Mandarin, the basic construction of an idea about when you did something goes: noun-time-verb-object . So, verb tenses can be very tricky to learn in English.	Use sentence frames to model appropriate sentence structure.

PONDER AND DISCUSS

- ▶ What percentage of your students speak Mandarin?
- ▶ Is their primary language Mandarin or one of the other Chinese dialects?
- ▶ How can you integrate Mandarin into your classroom?
- ▶ What countries of origin are represented in your classroom?
- ▶ What do you know about these countries? How can you learn more about them as a class?
- ▶ What Chinese traditions and holidays do your students celebrate? How can you integrate these celebrations into your school year?

Resources:

- [A Contrastive Study of the English and Chinese Comparative Construction \(Pan, 2012\)](#)
- [A Comparison of Word-formation between Chinese and English \(Yuqing, 2019\)](#)
- [ENL 2-Minute Tips: Supporting Mandarin Chinese-Speaking Students in the Classroom](#)