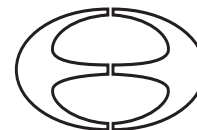


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An Update on Esperanto

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In a world increasingly aware of minority rights and linguistic and cultural diversity, the international language Esperanto is gaining renewed attention from policy-makers. . . . Non-governmental organizations and coalitions are pressing to have the international-language question placed on the agendas of the United Nations and the European Union. . . . In July 1996, the Nitobe Symposium of International Organizations brought together a group of independent experts in Prague, Czech Republic, which examined the present situation of Esperanto and called for its inclusion in current debates on language rights and language policy. The Prague Manifesto, a modern restatement of the values and goals underlying the Esperanto movement, emphasizes linguistic democracy and the preservation of linguistic diversity. . . . Esperanto speakers in the news recently include 1994 Nobel laureate in economics Reinhard Selten, 1996 World Chess Champion Zsuzsa Polgár, and Tivadar Soros, father of financier George Soros. . . . Indigenous Dialogues, a programme to strengthen dialogue among indigenous peoples across the world, bypasses former colonial languages by using Esperanto as a means of communication. . . . Here are some additional facts about the present state of Esperanto.

Purpose and origins. The basis of what became the international language Esperanto was published in Warsaw in 1887 by Dr. Lejzer Ludwik Zamenhof. The idea of a planned international language, intended not to replace ethnic languages but to serve as an additional, second language for all, was not new, but Zamenhof saw that such a language must develop through collective use, so he limited his initial proposal to a minimalist grammar and a small vocabulary. Esperanto is now a full-fledged language with a worldwide speech community and full linguistic resources. Many of Zamenhof's ideas anticipated those of the founder of modern linguistics, the structuralist Ferdinand de Saussure (whose brother René spoke Esperanto).

Characteristics. Esperanto is both spoken and written. Its lexicon derives primarily from Western European languages, while its syntax and morphology show strong Slavic influences. Esperanto morphemes are invariant and almost indefinitely recombinable into different words, so the language also has much in common with isolating languages like Chinese, while its internal word structure has affinity with agglutinative languages like Turkish, Swahili and Japanese.

Development. At first the language consisted of about 1000 roots, from which 10,000 or 12,000 words could be formed. Today, Esperanto dictionaries often contain 15,000 or 20,000 roots, from which hundreds of thousands of words can be formed, and the language continues to evolve: an Esperanto Academy monitors current trends. Over time, the language has been used for virtually every conceivable purpose, some of them controversial or problematic: the language was forbidden, and its users persecuted, by both Stalin, who considered it a language of "cosmopolitans," and Hitler, who considered it a language of

Jews (Zamenhof, creator of the language, was Jewish). Through use of the language in the home, there are now as many as a thousand native speakers of Esperanto.

Users. The Universal Esperanto Association (UEA), whose membership forms the most active part of the Esperanto community, has national affiliates in 62 countries and individual members in almost twice that number. Numbers of textbooks sold and membership of local societies put the number of people with some knowledge of the language in the hundreds of thousands and possibly millions. There are Esperanto speakers all over the world, with notable concentrations in countries as diverse as China, Japan, Brazil, Iran, Madagascar, Bulgaria and Cuba.

Teaching Esperanto. Communicative ability in Esperanto can be rapidly acquired, so it provides an ideal introduction to foreign-language study. Within weeks, students can begin to use Esperanto for correspondence, and within months for school trips abroad. Positive effects of the prior learning of Esperanto on the study of both first and second languages are suggested by experimental and anecdotal evidence. While it is taught in some schools, most people learn it through self-study or correspondence (using regular or electronic mail), or through local Esperanto clubs. There are textbooks and self-instruction materials in more than 100 languages. A new website for teachers of Esperanto, www.esperanto.net, gives some idea of the current educational activity.

Official recognition. In 1954 the Unesco General Conference recognized that the achievements of Esperanto match Unesco's aims and ideals, and official relations were established between Unesco and UEA. Collaboration between the two organizations continues. In 1977 Unesco's Director General, Mr. Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, addressed the 62nd World Esperanto Congress. In 1985 the General Conference of Unesco called on member states and international organizations to promote the teaching of Esperanto in schools and its use in international affairs. UEA also has consultative status with the United Nations, UNICEF, the Council of Europe, the Organization of American States, and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).

Meetings and travel. More than a hundred international conferences and meetings are held each year in Esperanto – without translators or interpreters. The biggest is the World Congress of Esperanto, held in Adelaide (1997), Montpellier (1998), Berlin (1999), Tel-Aviv (2000), and Zagreb (2001). World Congresses will take place in Fortaleza, Brazil (2002); Gothenburg, Sweden (2003); Beijing, China (2004); and Vilnius, Lithuania (2005). The first symposium of Esperanto speakers in Arab countries took place in Amman in 2000, the fifth All-Americas Congress was held in Mexico City in 2001, and the next Asian Congress will be held in Seoul in 2002. The 2002 list of the *Pasporta Servo*, a service run by UEA's youth section, contains addresses of 1200 hosts in 82 countries providing free overnight accommodation to Esperanto-speaking travelers.

Research and Libraries. Many universities include Esperanto in courses on linguistics; a few offer it as a separate subject. Particularly noteworthy are Eötvös Lóránd University in Budapest, with a degree option in Esperanto, and the University of Poznań, Poland, with a degree program in interlinguistics. The Modern Language Association of America's Annual Bibliography records more than 300 scholarly publications on Esperanto every year. The library of the Esperanto Association of Britain has more than 20,000 items. Other large libraries include the International Esperanto Museum in Vienna (part of the National Library of Austria), the Hodler Library at the UEA's headquarters in Rotterdam, and the Esperanto collection in Aalen, Germany. The Vienna and Aalen collections can be consulted through the Internet and the international lending system.

Professional contacts and special interests. Organizations for Esperanto speakers include those for doctors, writers, railway workers, scientists, musicians, and numerous others. They often publish their own journals, hold conferences and help to expand the language for professional and specialized use. The International Academy of Sciences of San Marino facilitates collaboration at the university level. Original and translated publications appear regularly in such fields as astronomy, computing, botany, entomology, chemistry, law and philosophy. Organizations exist for special-interest groups such as Scouts and Guides, the blind, chess and Go players; and UEA's youth section, TEJO, holds frequent international meetings and publishes its own periodicals. Buddhists, Shintoists, Catholics, Quakers, Protestants, Mormons and Baha'is have their own organizations, and many social-activist groups use the language.

Literature. The flourishing literary tradition in Esperanto has been recognized by PEN International, which accepted an Esperanto affiliate at its 60th Congress in September 1993. Notable present-day writers in Esperanto include the novelists Trevor Steele (Australia), István Nemere (Hungary) and Spomenka Štimec (Croatia); the poets William Auld (Scotland), Mikhail Gishpling (Russia/Israel) and Abel Montagut (Catalonia); and the essayists and translators Probal Dasgupta (India), Fernando de Diego (Venezuela) and Kurisu Kei (Japan). Auld was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in both 1999 and 2000 for his contributions to poetry.

Translations. Literary translations published recently include Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Umar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat*, Grass's *The Tin Drum*, Marco Polo's *Book of Wonders*, and Cao Xueqin's great family saga *Dream of the Red House*. For children, Asterix, Winnie-the-Pooh and Tin-Tin have been joined by Stewelpeter and Pippi Longstocking, and the complete Moomintroll books of world-renowned Finnish author Tove Jansson, as well as the Oz books of L. Frank Baum, have been made available on the World Wide Web. Translations out of Esperanto include *Maskerado*, a book published in Esperanto in 1965 by Tivadar Soros, father of the financier George Soros, detailing the survival of his family during the Nazi occupation of Budapest. This work was recently published in English in Britain (2000) and the United States (2001), and has now appeared also in Russian, German, and Turkish.

Theatre and cinema. Plays by dramatists as diverse as Goldoni, Ionesco, Shakespeare and Alan Ayckbourn have been performed in recent years in Esperanto. Many plays of Shakespeare exist in Esperanto translation: one of the most recent performances in Esperanto was a production of *King Lear* in Hanoi, Vietnam, in December 2001, with a local cast.

Although Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* used Esperanto-language signs in its sets, feature-length films are less common. A notable exception is William Shatner's cult film *Incubus*, whose dialogue is entirely in Esperanto.

Music. Musical genres in Esperanto include popular and folk songs, rock, cabaret, solo and choir pieces, and opera. Popular composers and performers, including Britain's Elvis Costello and the USA's Michael Jackson, have recorded in Esperanto, written scores inspired by the language, or used it in their promotional materials. Several tracks from the all-Esperanto Warner Music album *Esperanto*, launched in Spain in November 1996, placed high on the Spanish pop charts. Classical orchestra and chorus pieces with texts in Esperanto include Lou Harrison's *La Koro Sutro* and David Gaines's first symphony, both from the US. Music in Esperanto can be found on-line, including several sites devoted to Esperanto karaoke.

Periodicals. Over 100 magazines and journals are published regularly in Esperanto, including the monthly news magazine *Monato*, the literary magazine *Fonto*, and UEA's own journal *Esperanto*. The biweekly news digest *Eventoj* offers an electronic edition as well, as does *Monato*; a number of magazines provide on-line archives. Other periodicals include publications in medicine and science, religious magazines, periodicals for young people, educational periodicals, other literary magazines, and special-interest publications.

Radio and television. Radio stations in Austria, Brazil, China, Cuba, Estonia, Hungary, Italy and Poland broadcast regularly in Esperanto, as does Vatican Radio. Several programs are also available over the Internet. TV stations in various countries broadcast Esperanto courses, including a recent 16-part adaptation of the BBC's *Muzzy in Gondoland* on the Polish Channel One network.

Internet. Electronic networks are the fastest-growing means of communication among Esperanto speakers. There are several hundred mailing lists in Esperanto, for discussion of topics ranging from the family use of the language to the general theory of relativity. Esperanto is widely used in such chatroom protocols as ICQ, IRC and PalTalk. Web pages in Esperanto number in the hundreds of thousands. Some can be found through the Virtual Esperanto Library at <http://www.esperanto.net/veb/>, others by typing "Esperanto" in any search engine.

UEA services. UEA publishes books, magazines, and a year-book listing Esperanto organizations and local representatives around the world. These publications, along with information on records, cassettes, etc., are listed in UEA's book catalogue, also available on the World Wide Web (<http://www.uea.org/katalogo>). The Association's Book Service has more than 3500 titles in stock. An English-language series published by UEA, *Esperanto Documents* (ISSN 0165-2575), includes studies and reports on the current situation of Esperanto, which are available from its Central Office in Rotterdam.

For further information on Esperanto, contact UEA at Nieuwe Binnenweg 176, NL-3015 BJ Rotterdam, The Netherlands (tel. +31-10-436-1044; fax 436-1751; e-mail uea@inter.nl.net), at 777 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA (tel. +1-212-687-7041; fax 949-4177), or via its website at <http://www.uea.org>.