



ESPERANTO: THE INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE

There is still one major barrier to international communication — *the language barrier!*

You've certainly heard the cliché that "wherever you go in the world, everybody speaks English." In fact, about ten percent of the world speaks English — and almost half of that ten percent is to be found right here in the United States! In most countries, English is popular today, but spoken primarily by a part of the social and academic elite and by some (not all, not by any means!) workers in the tourist industry. Anyone who has visited a foreign country and struggled with the language barrier understands this. Americans are discovering what the rest of the world has long known: there is a real need for an international language.

Fortunately, there is such a language !

Its name is **Esperanto**. It was created by Dr. Ludwig L. Zamenhof, a Russian physician, who published it in 1887. Since then, Esperanto has been learned by millions. Of the many projects and proposals for an international language over the centuries, Esperanto is the only one that has stood the test of time and is being spoken today. It is in *daily* use by many thousands of people around the world, and the number is growing constantly.

Many international meetings are held in Esperanto. Books and magazines are published by the thousands to meet the demands of an international public. Some of the largest international firms put on special advertising campaigns in Esperanto. Hotels, restaurants and tourist resorts compete for the patronage of the Esperanto-speaking traveler.

Esperanto's impressive success as the language of international communication is due to three basic advantages. It is easy to learn. It is politically and socially neutral. And it has many practical uses.

Esperanto is fast to learn ...

Esperanto is *much faster to learn* than any other language.

In fact, it can be learned in a *fraction* of the time needed to learn any ethnic language! **Spelling:** each letter corresponds to exactly one sound. **Pronunciation:** there are no strange combinations of letters to create new sounds, and the accent is always on the next-to-last vowel. **Grammar:** there are few rules, no exceptions. (That last means, for example, that there are *no* irregular verbs to learn.) Even **vocabulary:** because of Esperanto's grammar-coding system and its

system of creating new words by combining basic words with prefixes, suffixes and each other, a very small learned vocabulary will provide the speaker with a much larger usable vocabulary, a fact that allows the student to use Esperanto for writing and speaking from very early in the learning process.

In short, Esperanto has been rationally constructed for ease of learning and use. This has made it especially popular with busy people who cannot afford to spend years learning a foreign language, which in any case would be useful in only a small part of the world.

Esperanto is neutral ...

Unlike most languages, Esperanto belongs to no one country or ethnic group; it is *politically and socially neutral*.

Many people, particularly in the West, today believe that English is similarly neutral, being widely spoken throughout the world. But in fact a majority of English speakers are found in only two countries: the United States and Great Britain. And these two countries between them control most of the international English-language information services. In neutral venues such as the United Nations, multiple languages must be used. The UN has six official languages; UNESCO uses fifteen; the European Union has, as of 2008, more than *twenty*. English is widely used in these organizations, but that is more a reflection of the global military, economic and political clout of the United States than of a genuine international desire to use English, a language most people cannot learn to a desirable level of competence.

Esperanto is not the property of any nation, national group, political party, or social class. It belongs to everyone — the more so because everyone can learn to use it competently. It carries with it no political or historical baggage that might hinder its acceptance. Every person who uses Esperanto is on an equal linguistic footing with all other users of the language. Esperanto's popularity in smaller nations and in non-European countries such as Japan and China is largely due to this neutrality. The result is a spirit of friendship and fellowship among Esperanto speakers which is quite impressive to those who see it in actual use.

Esperanto is practical ...

Esperanto offers *exceptional practical advantages* to the knowledgeable speaker.

... for reading

You can use Esperanto to get to know other countries and their people without ever leaving home. Books and magazines in Esperanto bring the news and culture of other countries right into your home.

... for correspondence

Through friendly correspondence with people in other countries, you can broaden your horizons and learn more about the world. Many American Esperanto speakers have pen pals abroad who share their hobbies and professional interests, and who can teach them about foreign customs and how other people live, as well as learning from them about our way of life.

...for listening

A number of radio stations around the world have regular broadcasts in Esperanto, many of them now available as on-demand transmissions over the internet. Stations that use Esperanto, furthermore, generally report more reactions from Esperanto-speaking listeners than from those hearing broadcasts in any other language! Check out Esperanto on the radio at http://www.esperanto-usa.org/info/general_links.html.

... for surfing the net

As the net becomes more international, it becomes less English-oriented. In 2001 English speakers lost their majority on the net for the first time, and it's now expected that in the near future the dominant group on the net will be speakers of *Chinese*. You can understand the growing importance of Esperanto in this medium. All sorts of material in and about Esperanto is available on-line. There are several hundred mailing lists where discussions are carried on in Esperanto. And there are thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of web pages in and about Esperanto; for starters, check out http://www.esperanto-usa.org/info/general_links.html.

... for travel

Travelers who speak Esperanto are not restricted to talking with those few people who cater to tourists. By writing ahead to an Esperanto-speaking representative in each place they visit, by visiting correspondents in many countries, or by using a network of Esperanto-speaking hosts such as *Pasporta Servo* when they travel, they can be sure of being met and helped. Wherever they go, they know they will find friends who speak the same language and share common interests. They will meet and talk with the people of the country instead of just looking at monuments. At