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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 organisations are pressing to have the international language question placed on agendas at the United Nations and the European Union. . . . The Prague Manifesto, a modern restatement of the values and goals underlying the Esperanto movement, emphasises linguistic democracy. . . . The celebration of 150 years since the birth of Zamenhof, the creator of Esperanto (1859-1917), commenced with a symposium at UNESCO headquarters in December 2008, culminated in the International Esperanto Congress in Zamenhof's birthplace of Bialystok (Poland), and ended in a symposium in New York attended by UN diplomats. . . . UEA (Universal Esperanto Association) is regularly proposed as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize, among others by the Polish Parliament in 2009. . . . The Burundi Esperanto Association became the seventieth member association of UEA. There are presently Esperanto associations in about twenty African countries. . . . The German city Herzberg declared itself an 'Esperanto city'. . . . The Esperanto version of Wikipedia contained more than 150,000 articles in the middle of 2011. . . . Despite containing more than 700 pages, a new English-language encyclopaedia of original Esperanto literature has been termed 'concise'. . . . Here are some additional facts about the current 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. However, 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 fully fledged language with a worldwide community of speakers and comprehensive language resources. Many of Zamenhof's ideas preceded those of the founder of modern linguistics, the structuralist Ferdinand de Saussure (whose brother René spoke Esperanto).

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

Development. At first the language consisted of about 1000 roots, from which 10,000 to 12,000 words could be formed. Today, Esperanto dictionaries often contain 15,000 to 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, as the language of 'cosmopolitans' Esperanto, and by Hitler, as the 'language of Jews' (Zamenhof was Jewish). Although Esperanto is intended as a second language, there now are also as many as a thousand native speakers of Esperanto who speak it as their home language.

Users. The Universal Esperanto Association (UEA), whose membership forms the most active part of the Esperanto community, has national affiliate associations in 70 countries and individual members in 120 countries. Based on the number of textbooks sold and membership of local societies, the number of people with some knowledge of Esperanto is in the hundreds of thousands and possibly millions. There are speakers of Esperanto all over the world, although there are notable concentrations in countries as diverse as China, Japan, Brazil, Iran, Madagascar, Bulgaria, and Cuba.

Teaching of Esperanto. The ability to communicate in Esperanto can be acquired quickly. Therefore, it provides an ideal introduction to the study of other languages. Within weeks students can begin to use Esperanto for correspondence, and within months for school trips abroad. Experiments and informal observations demonstrate that prior learning of Esperanto has a favourable influence on the learning of both first and second languages. Esperanto is taught in some schools, although most people learn it through self-study, by correspondence, at a class or over the Internet through sites such as www.lernu.net which offers courses in over 30 languages. There are textbooks and teach-yourself resources in more than 100 languages. The www.esperanto.net website gives some idea of current teaching activity.

Official recognition. In 1954 the UNESCO General Conference recognised that the achievements of Esperanto match UNESCO's aims and ideals, and official relations were established between UNESCO and UEA. In 1985 the General Conference called on member states and international organisations to promote the teaching of Esperanto in schools and its use in international affairs. UEA also has official relationships with the United Nations, UNICEF, the Council of Europe, the Organisation of American States, and the International Standards Organisation (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 International Esperanto Congress, which is held annually, most recently in Yokohama (2007), Rotterdam (2008), Bialystok (2009), Havana (2010), and Copenhagen (2011). The second Middle Eastern Esperanto Conference occurred in Iznik, Turkey in 2009,

the sixth Asian Congress in Mongolia in 2010, and the eighth Pan-American Congress in São Paulo in 2011.

The 2011 edition of the *Pasport a Servo* handbook (Passport Service), a service run by UEA's youth section, contains addresses of 1087 hosts in 90 countries providing free overnight accommodation to Esperanto-speaking travellers.

Research and libraries. Many universities include Esperanto in courses on linguistics, while a few offer it as a separate subject. Particularly noteworthy is the University of Poznan in Poland, which offers a degree programme in interlinguistics. The bibliography of the American Modern Language Association records more than 300 scholarly publications on Esperanto every year. The library at the International Esperanto Museum in Vienna (part of the National Library of Austria) has more than 35,000 items. Other major libraries with more than 20,000 items include the Hodler Library at UEA headquarters in Rotterdam, the British Esperanto Association's library at Stoke-on-Trent, the German Esperanto library at Aalen, and the Japanese Esperanto Association's library in Tokyo. The Vienna and Aalen collections can be consulted on-line and items are available through the international inter-loan system.

Professional contacts and special interests. Organisations for Esperanto speakers include those for doctors, writers, railway workers, scientists, musicians, and numerous others. They often publish their own magazines, hold conferences, and help to expand the language for professional and specialised use. The International Academy of Sciences of San Marino facilitates collaboration at the university level. Original and translated publications appear regularly in fields such as astronomy, IT, botany, chemistry, law, and philosophy to name a few. In 2009, UEA launched the 'Scientific Thought' series of scientific classics with Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. There are Esperanto special-interest groups for people such as scouts, chess players, go players, cat-lovers, and the blind. UEA's youth section, TEJO, organises international conferences and publishes magazines. Buddhists, Shintoists, Roman Catholics, Protestants, Quakers, Baha'is, and atheists have their own organisations, and many community, social and interest groups use the language. The *Sennacieca Asocio Tutmonda* (International Non-National Association) is made up of various worker groups.

Literature. Esperanto's flourishing literary tradition has been recognised by PEN International, which accepted an Esperanto affiliate group in 1993. The Esperanto Literature Academy, founded in 2008, promotes writing in Esperanto. Notable present-day writers in Esperanto include the novelists Trevor Steele (Australia), István Nemere (Hungary), Spomenka Štimec (Croatia), and Manuel de Seabra (Catalonia); poets Mauro Nervi (Italy), Mao Zifu (China), Mikhail Gishpling (Israel), and Abel Montagut (Catalonia); and the essayists and translators Probal Dasgupta (India) and Humphrey Tonkin (United States). The Esperanto poets William Auld, Marjorie Boulton, and Baldur Ragnarsson, have been proposed for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Translations. Most recent translations into Esperanto include Shakespeare's *The Winter Tale*, Manzoni's *The Betrothed*, *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez, *Maitreyi* by Eliade, *The Fateful Adventures of the Good Solider Švejk* by Hašek, and the Chinese classic *Pilgrim to the West* by Wu Chengen. Many anthologies have translations of poetry from various languages.

For children, *Asterix*, *Winnie the Pooh* and *Tintin* have been joined by *Der Struwwelpeter* and *Pippi Longstocking*, and the complete Moomintroll books by world-renowned Finnish

author Tove Jansson, as well as the Oz books of L. Frank Baum are available online.

Translations out of Esperanto include *Maskerado*, a book published in Esperanto in 1965 by Tivadar Soros, father of the financier George Soros, about his family's survival during the Nazi occupation of Budapest. This book has been published in English in Britain and the United States, and has appeared also in Russian, Hungarian, German, and Turkish. A book by the Polish journalist Roman Dobrzyński, *The Zamenhof Street*, has appeared in more than ten languages, most recently in French (2008) and Italian (2009).

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 by Shakespeare have been translated into Esperanto; a local cast performed *King Lear* in Esperanto in Hanoi, Vietnam.

Esperanto use in the cinema is less common. In scenes of Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* there are posters in Esperanto. In *Idiot's Delight* with Clark Gable and the Japanese film *Jan Arima* there are dialogues in Esperanto, while the cult film *Incubus* with William Shatner uses Esperanto only.

Music. Musical genres in Esperanto include popular and folk songs, rock, cabaret, solo and choral pieces, and opera. Popular composers and performers, including Elvis Costello and Michael Jackson, have recorded in Esperanto, written scores inspired by the language, or used it in their videos. Classical orchestral and choral pieces with texts in Esperanto include Lou Harrison's *La Koro Sutro* and David Gaines's first symphony, both from the United States. Music in Esperanto can be found online.

Magazines. Over 100 magazines and journals are published regularly in Esperanto, including the monthly news magazine *Monato*, the youth magazine *Kontakto*, and UEA's *Esperanto* magazine. Many magazines have an online edition and post past editions online. There are regular publications about medicine, science, and religion, as well as educational publications, literary reviews, and publications on special-interest topics.

Radio and television. Radio stations in Brazil, China, Cuba, Poland and the Vatican broadcast regularly in Esperanto. Many more programmes are available online. Esperanto-TV in Bialystok broadcasts regular programmes in Esperanto.

Internet. Esperanto is used widely on the Internet, and its use is growing rapidly. There are several hundred discussion groups which cover topics from family use of Esperanto to the general theory of relativity. Esperanto is widely used in the ICQ, IRC, MSN, and Skype instant messaging programmes. Computer programmes, for example spelling and grammar checkers and keyboard settings, have been created in Esperanto. Programmes such as Open Office, Firefox, IrfanView, the KDE graphical desktop environment, and the Ubuntu and Mandriva operating systems are available in Esperanto. Popular websites such as Google, Wikipedia, Facebook, and Ipernity have Esperanto versions.

UEA services. UEA publishes books, magazines, and a yearbook listing Esperanto organisations and local representatives around the world. These publications, as well as information on CDs, DVDs etc can be found at www.uea.org/katalogo. UEA's book service has about 5,000 titles in stock.

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