

A Language for All

The European Union has over 20 official languages, which results in an enormous amount of money being spent every day on translations and interpreting. The Swiss economist François Grin was asked to look into this issue and make suggestions. In 2005, he published a report which suggested the use of a “constructed language” – that is, an artificial language which has been specially invented for the purpose of making communication easier. By far the best-known constructed language is Esperanto.

Esperanto was invented in 1877 by L. L. Zamenhof, a Polish eye doctor. He was fascinated by the idea of a world without war, and believed that this could happen with the help of an international language. Hoping to promote harmony and peace between countries, Zamenhof’s aim was to make learning Esperanto as easy as possible, so its vocabulary and grammar are straightforward.

Linguists estimate that Esperanto can be learned in 5%-25% of the time required to learn other languages. For example, one study suggested that French school students would need to study English for 1,500 hours, but Esperanto for only 150 hours, to attain the same level of proficiency. It has also been shown that learning Esperanto makes it easier to learn a third language. In one study, a group of students learned Esperanto for one year and then French for three years. At the end of the four years, they were significantly better at French than a control group which had studied French for four years.

Despite all these good reasons for learning Esperanto, there are probably only between one to two thousand native speakers of Esperanto – that is, people who have learned the language as small children from their Esperanto-speaking parents. In contrast, there are about 400 million native English-speakers and perhaps 1.1 billion people speak it as a secondary language. The problem for Esperanto is one of co-ordination – it is an idea which can only really work if a lot of people take it on simultaneously. It is pointless to learn Esperanto unless many other people do as well. Zamenhof himself said that it might take “many centuries” for Esperanto to become a universal language.

1. **Add True or False, quoting the relevant information from the text to justify your answer.** (2 points)
 - a) François Grin was asked to construct an artificial language.
 - b) It doesn’t take a long time to learn Esperanto.
2. **Answer the following questions according to the information given in the text. Use your own words.** (2 points)
 - a) What motivated Zamenhof to develop Esperanto?
 - b) What are the benefits of learning Esperanto?
3. **Find words or phrases in the text which mean the same as the following:** (1 point)
 - a) examine
 - b) easy to learn or understand
 - c) reach
 - d) without purpose
4. **Complete the second sentence in each pair. The meaning should be the same as that of the first sentence.** (2 points)
 - a) François Grin looked into this issue, and in 2005, he published a report.
He published a report
 - b) By far the best-known constructed language is Esperanto.
No other
 - c) Esperanto was invented in 1877 by Dr Zamenhof, a Polish eye doctor.
Dr Zamenhof, who
 - d) It has also been shown that learning Esperanto makes it easier to learn a third language.
If you