

THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ESPERANTO

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ABSTRACT

One of the first tasks faced by Zamenhof, the inventor of Esperanto (1887), was establishing its status as a living language, achieved in part by teaching the language to others, in part by translation and literary creation, and in part by forming a community of users. One of the earliest learners, Leo Tolstoy, emphasized its ease of learning, and both the early history of the language and contemporary experience show that the receptive and productive skills entailed in learning the language are unusually mutually reinforcing. In formal language-learning situations, students are able to reach an acceptable level of proficiency relatively quickly, allowing them to put the language to practical use. They are also able to learn on their own. Ease of learning builds confidence, so that Esperanto constitutes a good introduction to language study in general, even though the language is more complex linguistically than it may appear at first sight. The language also helps the learning of cultural sensitivity. In recent years, electronic aids to teaching and learning have proliferated and there are many resources available to the teacher and learner.

KEY WORDS

Esperanto, Esperanto teaching, propaedeutics, proficiency standards, language learning, language teaching

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INTRODUCTION: A LIVING LANGUAGE

In 1887 Dr L.L. Zamenhof published his first proposal for introducing a medium of communication that would challenge the accepted but inherently discriminatory hierarchy in relationships among languages and their speakers. Native speakers of a language have all the advantages in discourse over those who did not learn it from infancy. Speakers of minority tongues are disadvantaged compared to those whose thoughts and ideas can be communicated naturally in a language of world currency.

This challenge to the established order, launched from the unlikely source of a small volume authored by an eye specialist living in Russian-occupied Poland, raised from the very beginning a basic question that language scholars and the public in general have insisted on repeating to this day: “Is Esperanto a real language?” – followed by its corollary: “Can this language be taught and learned to a level of proficiency that allows its speakers free and untrammelled oral and written communication, not only across cultures, but in all areas of human thought and endeavour?” It then becomes incumbent on us to enquire whether the ability of these speakers actually parallels the apparent – though admittedly at times deceptive – ease with which individuals possessing native mastery of ethnic languages respond to each other. More significantly, could the desire to communicate lead committed speakers, whether or not they are self-aware of their own deficiencies, to gloss over instances of miscommunication, or else be satisfied with their interactions remaining at a level of comfortable superficialities without even realizing their relative lack of linguistic sophistication, not to mention cultural sensitivity?

The first instance of the teaching and learning of Esperanto was evidently when the young Zamenhof as a high school student introduced his friends to the idea he had actually been working on for some fourteen years prior to the appearance of his first book. This slender volume was published modestly with the title *Lingvo Internacia* under the pseudonym of “Dr Esperanto”, meaning the doctor who was “hoping” that his idea would meet with acceptance by the public. Though it has been interpreted otherwise, that written outline by no means represented the actual genesis of the proposal being advanced by “Doktoro Esperanto”. His design for an international language had been subjected to a limited but rigorous crucible experience during which its viability as a tool for spoken as well as written communication had been tried, tested and improved where he and his companions had found it wanting. Esperanto’s origin could not be claimed to compare to the spontaneous self-assertion of language among early peoples when their very survival provided the motivation to develop and utilize the organs of speech and the capabilities available to them. In those cases, increasingly sophisticated levels of communication were enabled naturally and progressively through further cognitive development, enhanced by greater evolution of auditory comprehension and expressive speech ability. However Zamenhof’s new potential tool for bridging language barriers was neither conceived nor experimentally evolved as a purely studious written construct. In this respect it can fairly be stated that Zamenhof’s effort differed from almost all of the hundreds of isolated individual projects for creating a planned language initiated by philosophers and other intellectuals prior to the appearance of Zamenhof’s *Unua Libro* in 1887 [1].

Languages typically have evolved autonomously with relatively little effective intervention by self-constituted authorities. Exceptions are those that have been directed in their development through more deliberate planning, as in the cases of the common languages of Israel and Indonesia. In virtually all instances, functionality for the exchange of information, concepts, ideologies and opinion has been paramount. Then follows the higher goal of

liberating the expression of human thought, feeling and aspiration through the medium of literature. Zamenhof was convinced that Esperanto would have no claim to credibility if it could not demonstrate its value through original writing that appealed to the highest sentiments of humanity, and he himself provided some of the first models in order to encourage others to continue in that line. No less important was the language's ability to render the finest of world literature with a precision in transparent reflection of the original text, not just in content but also in style. Effective translations into Esperanto should also evidence a power of linguistic expression not totally eclipsed by the levels achieved and recognized in other languages developed over hundreds or thousands of years [2].

Esperanto has established for itself a community of users who in some ways have identified themselves just as strongly with the language and its cultural context as those who defend and advocate for their own ethnic tongues. Yet this is not and could never be the kind of nationalistic stance which is regularly taken by such advocates. Those who see the value of Esperanto in their own lives naturally wish to witness a greater recognition of this grounded, viable contemporary expression of the concept of a truly neutral, global communication tool. Yet they are not seeing it primarily as an essential means for preserving their own identity and values or of Esperanto itself. On the contrary, it represents a clear and unclouded window on to other languages, cultures and peoples, and as such can enable a greater understanding of them. In this way it can bring the unique values of these "others" to a desirable level of appreciation in its learners, since through a common means of communication the first focus is almost inevitably on identifying with what they share with the "others": to the point where the negative connotations of the word and concept diminish, rather than subtly reinforcing linguistic and cultural divisions and boundaries. While encouraging all ages of learners to maintain ownership of their own linguistic and cultural heritage and its values, the teaching of Esperanto has a uniquely demonstrated potential to aid students in ameliorating prejudice towards other peoples and groups. Through linking with peers around the world, learners naturally enhance a sense of their own identity as citizens of a global community. This in turn tends to lead to less fear of the strange or unknown, and a greater willingness to interact with those who are different from themselves both at home and abroad.

LEARNING ESPERANTO

If we accept the premise that Esperanto is indeed a living language, one that would be hard to deny after over a century of active oral use and more than 30 000 registered publications, including the major world classics in Esperanto translation, then come the obvious questions. How has it been taught and learned over the years? With what purposes and goals? How effectively? Is the teaching and learning of Esperanto similar to the way a second language is typically taught, and are there or should there be fundamental differences?

From Zamenhof's time to today, there are clear indicators of very distinct answers to the last question. By the early twentieth century, the French publishing company Hachette and a number of others were regularly publishing textbooks and literature in Esperanto. By the second half of the century Linguaphone, Assimil and others [3] were producing recorded courses to facilitate audio learning of the language. Almost all of these, including *Secondary School Esperanto* (distributed by HarperCollins) [4, 5] and other typical texts, looked very similar to their counterparts for ethnic languages. In this century, Eurotalk publishes five different levels of its well-known computer-based courses in Esperanto. The template for each language presented in the Eurotalk series is basically the same. There continues to be little difference in how Esperanto is presented in these media compared to traditional languages and courses.

Historically parallel to these trends, however, an impressively large body of practice contradicts the supposition that "all languages are created equal" for the native speaker or the

learner. The final word has yet to be spoken on how children actually acquire language, with no one scholar's conclusions considered as definitive. Yet the widespread assumption that this acquisition is in almost all cases relatively effortless belies the fact that different features of languages require comparatively more or less time to master, the concept of "mastery" of a language being itself controversial. College teachers in the United States and certainly other English-speaking countries bemoan the stunning lack of spelling literacy in certain incoming native-speaking freshmen, not just in the student contingent from abroad. Even though there is a closer fit between the spoken and written forms of Spanish than English, native speakers are just as prone to egregious mistakes in certain features, with the *Real Academia Española* and its associated Academies in Latin America recently relaxing the rules on the necessity for written accents (one might suspect partially in response to the high level of uncertainty in their use along with the practical suspension of such niceties in texting and other informal interchange).

When we look at Esperanto, we find ourselves anecdotally in a whole different universe. Of necessity there are spelling conventions to be learned, and a relatively mild and totally regular system of diacritics to be internalized to hold the number of letters in its modified Roman alphabet to 28. Esperanto has been suggestively identified as the newest of the Romance languages, at least on the basis of certain identifiable structural features and the priority of its selection of vocabulary. This assertion has evoked protests from those who point to its unique systematization of word construction and relatively non-complex syntax, which two features appear to make it more accessible to Asian learners, as well as enabling the language to serve as a viable interlanguage matrix for machine translation.

The first well-known figure to be quoted on the subject of learning Esperanto was the great Russian author Count Leo Tolstoy. Since the first text for learning the language was the *Unua Libro* published for Russian speakers in 1887, it is not surprising that Tolstoy was one of the earliest intellectuals to become familiar with Zamenhof's proposal, and he was already writing about it in his diary as well as to a Polish friend in 1889. He found the idea to be "absolutely necessary" for the progress of humankind, and corroborated his conviction by relating that he had learned to read texts in the language in just two hours (in another statement, in three to four hours). The point here is that Tolstoy had done this entirely on his own with no instructor but the text he had been sent, as have hundreds of thousands of others who followed him. While Tolstoy did not have the time to become an active promoter of the language, he remained enthusiastic for at least one reason that many people have persisted in learning it even when not highly motivated to do so: the observation that one can make much faster progress than in any other language in the acquisition of any or all of the four associated skills, listening comprehension and reading (receptive), speaking and writing (productive). This fact alone has guaranteed the continuing attractiveness of Esperanto to a range of people of all generations, from polyglots to failed second language learners alike.

TRANSFERABILITY OF SKILLS

A further indicator of the distinct nature of the language Zamenhof gave as his legacy to humanity was the first of a series of events that would have significant impact on the spread of Esperanto as a new but elaborated *lingua franca* for the world. In 1905, there gathered in the northern French coastal city of Boulogne-sur-Mer 688 people from some 20 different countries, who filled an auditorium to listen to Zamenhof and verify their hope that communication in this new language was actually possible. Although for many this was the first time they had heard or spoken the language with others, they found themselves able to understand the person they had all come to hear, and could then put into practice with the other attendees at the first *Universala Kongreso* what they had learned through reading and, in some cases, substantial correspondence. The experience was a revelation, perhaps

according to accounts from the time even at a Pentecostal level, for many of those who had made the long journey from all parts of Europe and beyond. They needed confirmation of a renewed hope that had been dashed by the problems of an earlier attempt at a constructed language called *Volapük*. Unlike Zamenhof, its creator Johann Martin Schleyer did not have the humility to allow for the natural development of the language by its evolving speech community. The combination of his insisting on personal control and maintaining some features that made it challenging to use with ease sounded the death knell of his own project, though it actually enjoyed a sufficient degree of success that an enterprise of this sort was no longer viewed as either ridiculous or a totally unattainable ideal.

The communication phenomenon that was observed in Boulogne-sur-Mer, namely the ability to activate in spontaneous speech what one has learned only through grammatical study and reading, or at best with thinking and speaking directed only to oneself, had been far less in evidence at the first *Volapük* convention. For Esperanto, however, it was reinforced in my personal experience just a few years ago when I was visiting a university to evaluate a secondary certification program for new language teachers. I had hoped to meet personally with a student whose name I had seen in Internet correspondence, and whom I had contacted prior to the visit. Although we did not have the opportunity to get together, I was able to converse with him on the telephone for forty minutes. At the end of the conversation came the matter-of-fact but no less astonishing statement “As a language teacher you might be interested to know that this is the first time I have ever spoken to anyone in Esperanto”. Unbelievable though that sounded even with my experience of the language, it confirmed both the historical record and what I had been deducing from the experience of other learners. This transfer among language skills does not routinely happen in the learning of other languages except in the case of highly talented polyglots, many of whom are able to activate in speech what they have learned through writing and study of a language’s phonetic system. For the average adult learner, however, it has been verified by recent contemporary research and studies in language acquisition that an intensive and highly interactive mode in teaching is generally the most effective approach to developing fluency in a second language.

One more anecdote comes from direct personal experience. My two daughters were raised hearing me speak to them in Esperanto, and listening to stories which I read them out of Esperanto-language children’s books from around the world. Their only other contact with the language was during occasional visits with other speakers and a one-week-long children’s camp in Spain, where Esperanto was the only language of communication for all activities. These yearly events for children and young people raised speaking Esperanto, or having learned it later in school or from a friend or family member, are known as little congresses for children, *Infanaj Kongresetoj*. Later in their teens, for a couple of years my daughters accompanied me and my wife as a family when I was teaching Esperanto in the summer program of San Francisco State University in California. With no light trepidation, on my part as well as theirs, I enrolled them for the university credit that was granted by that program for the several decades of its sponsorship by SFSU. They listened (no problem understanding the other teachers and students), spoke (somewhat of a surprise since I had never insisted on their speaking anything other than English to me), and then did the necessary reading and written assignments, which were fairly lengthy. To this day it is hard for me to imagine how they picked up on the writing system since I had never given them any specific instruction in it. Unless someone was secretly providing them some training on the side (that would have been an achievement as I know my wife wasn’t doing it!), it could have come only from their occasional silent following along with me as I was reading their children’s books at night, or if out of interest they had happened to pick up the books at other times to reinforce what I was doing with them.

ESPERANTO IN THE SCHOOLS

All these experiences have a specific bearing on the teaching and learning of Esperanto, for several reasons. The first is that Esperanto can clearly be acquired to a near-native level of fluency by children who are exposed to competent speakers as they are growing up, even when in a different language environment and if those speakers evidence less than a native level of proficiency. As an extension of this in a primary or elementary school situation, children can learn to communicate with the teacher and each other, and subsequently with classes from many areas of the world, even if the teacher is not very experienced in the use of the language. This may happen in just a few months, or even weeks, depending on how intense the program is and how much actual practice the students are getting. One of the greatest values of teaching Esperanto at the primary school level is that even small children can forge ahead with their creative use of language, unimpeded by the teacher having to correct them for exceptions to the rules. No exchanges like “I goed to the store with daddy yesterday” – “Oh, you went with daddy to buy something?” No need for correctives such as, “No, a cow has calves, not puppies, and a cat has kittens”. In Esperanto, when one knows the suffix for “offspring” (-id-, “katidoj”), it applies universally to all living things, so guessing is much more likely to bring the reward of success. When one’s progress is clearly evident and readily experienced, this in itself is a motivating factor to keep the student’s interest. Most students in the United States find language learning laborious and not very productive, hence the conclusion that Americans are “not good language learners”. In the college where I teach, 80 % of U.S. freshmen need to return to classes in first-year language, even with up to four years of experience in high school.

Despite the technological advances which can truly support and enhance the experience of learning another language, it is a challenging goal for students meeting a one-year language requirement to perform at the level of meaningful conversations on everyday topics of interest. College students in the United States will rarely experience the satisfaction of achieving this outcome. They typically remain at the Novice level of proficiency in their first year (comparable to A1 on the CEFR scale), and only a few reach the ideal goal of Intermediate (A2). However, an A2 or Intermediate rating is a reasonable and expected outcome of the effective teaching of Esperanto in a class situation within the first semester of instruction. It was achieved by some beginning learners who were tested by a trained ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) evaluator at the close of the three-week intensive summer program at San Francisco State. This result was replicated in classes offered by the School for International Training (a division of World Learning) in Brattleboro, Vermont, where for two years all students were pre-tested and post-tested to OPI standards. Linguistically experienced students would often go beyond this level of achievement and progress through several levels on the ACTFL scale, e.g. from Novice High to Intermediate High, a rather remarkable achievement for a three-week program, however intensive [6].

It is often claimed that Esperanto can be learned four or five times as fast as an ethnic language, and there is some evidence for this assertion, especially in the receptive skills. However, attaining the fluency and accuracy that characterize a “distinguished” level speaker (ACTFL), a “4” on the DLR scale or a “C2” in the CEFR, is by no means a routine achievement for the average speaker of Esperanto. Many seem content to remain in the CEFR “B” range, ACTFL Intermediate-Advanced, 1-2 on the ILR five-point scale. It seems likely that the relative paucity of intermediate and advanced courses offered regularly to adepts of Esperanto contributes to only the most dedicated learners being able to approach native-like ease of expression with no pattern of errors, evidencing a mastery of its phonology, structure and a wide-ranging choice of vocabulary.

When the target language is Esperanto, however, and communication has been established with students their age from another country, this communication has been shown to foster in young people of all ages empathy with their peers elsewhere, and interest in more contacts with other cultures (and quite frequently interest in learning more languages). Exchanges of information among learners of different native languages can occur within just a few weeks at any level [7].

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

This more authentic, less classroom-bound learning is of course facilitated by Skype and other forms of audio and video transmission that make use of the Internet, and planned group encounters of young people for truly experiential learning result in friendships across countries and continents extending beyond the experience itself. I was privileged to be an invited observer at one instance of such gatherings for high school students who are able to communicate in the language and wish to develop their skills and contacts further. *Euroscola* brings together in Strasbourg on an annual basis several hundred 16-18 year old students from all 27 European Union Member States to work together in a multilingual European Youth Parliament. Some 40 students from five different countries and schools where they were learning Esperanto spent an intensive week together, while taking part in the *Euroscola* activities designed to promote a stronger sense of European identity. When not in the Parliament sessions, they also took classes both to strengthen their knowledge of Esperanto itself, and to put it into practice through substantial guided discussions on the assigned topics of the gathering. Their own teachers and others from as far as Ukraine served as rotating instructors, giving them a truly multicultural learning experience. In their spare time, as they got to know their companions in more informal settings, they were naturally free to practice other languages they were learning with native speakers of those languages who were part of the group. My interviewing of these students revealed that they truly valued the uniqueness of their experience during this week. Esperanto had not necessarily become for them either a guiding purpose or a transcendent ideology for their lives; rather it was the practical and pragmatic means by which they had expanded their knowledge and limited sense of identity, in order to feel a broader sense of friendship and camaraderie, one that transcended national and linguistic boundaries as well as misconceptions about those different from themselves.

These days, many young people plan for their own intercultural travel experiences. One of my own students spent 17 months in Europe, for a total expenditure of less than \$6000 including air fare, travelling to youth conferences in Esperanto that focused on the environment and other topics of current concern and interest to her and the others attending. Between conferences, she stayed in the homes of Esperanto speakers across Europe, where she was welcomed free of charge under the aegis of the *Pasporta Servo*, which encourages young people and others to take advantage of such opportunities for intercultural learning beyond the confines of just a single country and language environment. The ethical sense of mutual respect, appreciation and care for others within the Esperanto community provided a safe environment and support structure for a young woman travelling alone.

As described earlier, one of the stronger claims for the value of Esperanto instruction as a first non-native language in primary and secondary schools is the motivational advantages of relatively rapid learning and early contact with other speakers who are studying it at the same time in different countries. Beginning in 1956, such contacts were facilitated by French-speaking teacher Marcel Erbetta, from Switzerland, who over the following years collected student work from schools in 21 countries, copying it, and redistributing it several weeks later, in the form of a magazine issued always in 25 copies and sent to each the schools who had contributed to his "Seeds in the Wind" or *Grajnoj en Vento*. These publications included accounts of visits abroad and other activities, with one enthusiastic group reporting that they had

an experience of a lifetime in Yugoslavia, after a few days no longer thinking of themselves as in another country. Today, it no longer takes several weeks for students to communicate with each other. Classroom-to-classroom and person-to-person contacts are instantaneous and repeated as often as there is time to set them up and interest in preparing and pursuing them.

ESPERANTO AS AN INTRODUCTION TO LANGUAGE LEARNING

For those engaged in largely classroom-centred learning, the “Propaedeutic value of Esperanto” is the title of a Wikipedia article that details more than a dozen experiments in teaching Esperanto prior to a more standard second language in the school environment. The premise is that once a student has spent some time learning the international language, this experience facilitates the acquisition of a second language to the point where no time has been lost to that endeavour by the initial detour into Esperanto. While we still await a truly definitive controlled study involving at least several hundred students in different learning environments over a period of years, these experiments do point to a fairly consistent conclusion [8].

When, for instance, students take a year of Esperanto and then three years of a language such as French, it can be expected that those learners can reach a proficiency in French that is relatively comparable to the results obtained by a control group that did not study Esperanto and stayed with French for the full four years. Norman Williams, headmaster of Egerton Park School in Denton, England, presided over a 25-year-long program involving the controlled study of students who took Esperanto prior to French and those who didn't. He became convinced that the experiment had met with total success since he believed that his Esperanto students were consistently equal to or superior in French proficiency to those who had studied only French [9, 10]. J.H. Halloran, a researcher in psychology at the University of Hull who was invited to take an objective outside look at the program, did not sign on to all of the positive conclusions of Headmaster Williams. However, he did agree that the data showed students with lower language learning aptitude to be at an advantage in their French studies after taking Esperanto [11]. This is just one of the studies of Esperanto teaching and learning carried out over the years, several of which are summarized by Maxwell and by Fantini and Reagan [12, 13].

The fact that when people learn the first language after their own, the next one becomes easier and the third easier still, is such a widespread experience that I have rarely seen or heard it seriously questioned, except by those who count themselves among the “failed language learners” of this world. This situation already gives the claims of Esperanto some initial credibility without even adding into consideration the relative ease of learning that comes from its regularity.

HOW DIFFERENT IS ESPERANTO?

In the realm of methodology, has the teaching and learning of Esperanto followed the pattern of all other languages? Here again we see both a positive and a negative answer. Some teachers and textbook authors, including William Auld, a former president of the Esperanto Academy, tried to go their own way by insisting that the structure of Esperanto was such that a text and method devised to support it needed to be completely distinct from those used for teaching other languages [14]. Despite these attempts, the teaching of Esperanto has generally recognized that effective skill building needs to make use of the techniques that have been successful for the learning of other languages, while taking advantage of Esperanto's regularity and special characteristics. So Esperanto teaching has seen the cycles of methods and approaches that have characterized language instruction around the world. These are documented in the second edition of the 2005 publication *Manlibro pri instruado de Esperanto* edited by Katalin Kováts, so I will not examine them in detail here [15, 16]. The

grammar-translation approach was heavily in evidence historically as a means of learning Esperanto, and has not been completely abandoned even today.

However, one explanation for the success of Esperanto among Europe's working class as well as intellectuals between the world wars was the way it was taught to millions of learners over a period of decades. By the 1880s, Maximilian Berlitz and others had set the course for what would be known as the "direct method" in which only the target language is used for classroom work, including grammar explanations. By 1920 András Cseh had devised a method that enabled him to teach groups of people with diverse native languages using only Esperanto for conversation and the teaching of its grammar. Since he would often teach workers at night after heavy days in the factory, he kept his early classes lively and humorous, focused on what he termed "conversations" with heavy reliance on group response and no homework. He was invited to teach all over Europe and trained many others to follow in his method. While successful in motivating the learners, it did not necessarily free them from native-language interference to internalize Esperanto's authentic structural patterns, and provided simplified explanations of the grammar which could prevent some speakers from gaining a full cognitive understanding of how Esperanto differed from their native language.

This experience points to an interesting contradiction. Publicists for Esperanto had as their goal to present the language as a model system free from complexities, and Zamenhof found himself in the position of having to describe his language in terms of only "sixteen rules of grammar", under pressure to satisfy their insistent demands. However the problem with this approach is that all languages rest on complex systems, given that the expression of thoughts and ideas in clear and compelling forms for communication to others could never be characterized as a simple task, or one that didn't require a lifetime of refining. A teacher may decide to use a "direct method" to teach the target language, simplifying the grammatical relationships so that no difficulty appears to remain. Yet, like the proverbial elephant in the room, the complex internalized thought patterns of the learner's native language, or other acquired languages, are silently present in the classroom without the students being aware of their effect, unless these are overtly brought to their attention.

In actual fact, grammars of Esperanto are often no less extensive than those of other languages. It takes considerable explanation to describe the intuitive choices of competent speakers of any language, and to point out where interference from other languages can lead to significant mistakes in communication. If a language claims that it can express any concept in human thought, then the complexities of thought will inevitably lead to challenges in finding the clearest and most exact way to express what is in that thought. In kindness to their listeners or readers, all users of any language must be constantly alert to how they can communicate their meaning in the clearest possible way. This becomes crucial when the listeners and readers are from widely different backgrounds in the way they use their native languages. "False friends" or misleading cognates where similar words in the two languages have different meanings, or perhaps close but not exact nuances of meaning, are a very obvious pitfall. Yet many more mistakes are also made through the learner's assumption that there should be a one-to-one correspondence in meaning and usage between a word in one language and a word in the other. The learning of Esperanto cannot shortcut the complexities of any of these operations. Its relative flexibility in word order and lack of irregularities are still a great boon to the beginning learner, but it requires attentive observation, effort and a willingness to keep verifying one's assumptions to master even the regularities of syntax, structure, word formation and meaning. When this continual development does not take place, we see the not unknown phenomenon of the *eterna komencanto* or eternal beginner, one who rises to a level of personal comfort while oblivious to the effect of this position on those who value the development of a full range of expression so as not to limit the quality or clarity of the ideas being shared.

Teaching and learning are themselves complex processes, whatever the material being learned. Each teacher has a level of knowledge, and preferences in either conveying what is to be learned or in drawing it out of the students. Teachers choose how to balance skill-based and cognitive learning. Each learner has abilities and challenges, and teachers are becoming aware of the need to address distinct learning styles and levels of ability through differentiated instruction. Teaching a language through listening comprehension promises to be a challenge to a “visual learner” unless visual aids are provided, even with the teacher aiming to have all students become better auditory learners. Bringing the complex system of a language together with the complexities of teaching and learning at the individual level may seem to be a daunting task. It is, however, not one that leaves no hope.

There are many challenges and cautions to be aware of in evaluating the benefits of teaching and learning Esperanto. Not least of these is to be aware that the learning of cultural sensitivity is not an automatic corollary of learning a language. In the specific case of Esperanto, the fact that two people share for their communication the same language, one that is inherently non-discriminatory since both speakers have had to make the effort to learn it and are on the same psychological level, is clearly a great benefit. However, this linguistic compatibility may mask the need for training in sensitivity to the other cultures with which one is interacting, and to the individuals who are hosting those visiting their culture. Esperanto speakers are typically extremely tolerant of cultural gaffes, since that is a characteristic of their own idealistic culture. Yet this is no excuse for ignorance of appropriate behaviour when sojourning in another culture. It is therefore vital to prepare students when they visit the countries and homes of other speakers to initiate exchanges on what is appropriate and acceptable. Esperanto was designed to make relationships among citizens of the world more harmonious, thus contributing to resolving conflict on a personal and national level. This does not happen without an increase in conscious awareness of our own acculturated behaviours and their effects on others if we make no effort or show no willingness to adapt to norms that are different from our own.

In conclusion, we have seen some of the unique characteristics of Esperanto as a language, a developed bridge across cultures that becomes fully functional through experiences with speakers from backgrounds different from the learner’s own. It is a language that seems to more readily provide success to those learning without a teacher, and whichever approach such learners take, there appears to be an advantage in the more ready transfer of knowledge and practice among the four skills than with other languages. The Internet portal *lernu.net* [17] has proved itself to be one of the most effective language learning portals in the world, to the extent that its developers have received awards and commissions to create similar sites for the learning of other languages. It provides extensive online materials, and can connect learners with tutors and others who will support their learning. Teachers of Esperanto have the incentive of becoming certified through the Esperanto version of the CEFR proficiency interview to determine their level of functionality in the language. These instructors may take advantage of publications and seminars offered around the world to guide them in the utilization of all the latest methodologies, including applications of technology. With the help of teacher training sessions, contemporary courses increasingly focus on communicative activities including situational learning. There is much progress to be made for the teaching of Esperanto to make a more definitive impact on the achievement of its objectives. Yet a foundation has been built that will enable further verification of its claims to bring a unique light to the goal of promoting greater understanding among the world’s peoples.

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