



Esperanto

Rob English-speakers coming to live in France are often faced with the hurdle of learning a new language. How difficult this hurdle is to overcome depends very much on the individual, but I can't help but wonder if life wouldn't be a lot easier if we had one language in common. ALAIN BOURNEL is a teacher of Esperanto in central Brittany; maybe he has a solution. First of all, Alain, can you explain what is Esperanto, when was it invented, what's its history?

Alain Well, the history of Esperanto begins in Poland, in the town of Bielstock, where a young man called Ludvig Zamenhof lived at the time of the Russian occupation of Poland. He noticed that in the market there were different languages in each community: Russian, Polish, Hebrew, and he couldn't understand why people couldn't understand one another. It created conflicts, so he said to himself: I'm going to invent a new international language which everyone will be able to use. So he started on the language and in 1887, the first Esperanto grammar appeared. There were 16 grammar rules, rules which would not change, and which could be used internationally. Now there are 5 to 6 million Esperanto speakers throughout the world. It's relatively easy to learn, certainly easier than other languages, than English for example. About 80% of the language is Latin-based, as he chose words from the most commonly-used languages, Latin, Anglo-Saxon and so on. There are no irregular verbs, no exceptions whatsoever, and there are three verb endings: past, present and future. They're "-is, -as, -os", and they're the same endings throughout the conjugation. I'll take an example: "I sing" in Esperanto is "mi cantas"; in the past "mi cantis", in the future, "mi cantos". In the present tense, it goes: "mi cantas, vi cantas, li cantas, ni cantas, vi cantas, illi cantas" ; always the same ending. That makes things a lot easier, especially compared to English, with all its irregular verbs and other complications! French is also complicated, in fact most languages have all sorts of difficulties.

Rob Why do you think people should learn Esperanto?

Alain I think people want to learn Esperanto because it's an international language, to travel, to talk to people across the world. No matter where you are, if you can speak Esperanto, you will understand someone who speaks that language.

It's a living language, you know. As I said earlier, there are 5-6 million people across the world who speak Esperanto. And you can say everything in Esperanto, all your feelings, everything, in a simple and very precise fashion. It

is a language where there is a root word, and all the variations are made by adding prefixes or suffixes. All you need to do is learn a few prefixes and suffixes, and you can say an infinite number of things! To take an example: "horse" in Esperanto is "chevalo", the "-o" ending signifying a common noun. A mare is "chevalino", the "-ino" signifying a feminine noun. It can be added to any noun to make a feminine. If I say "chevalido", the "-ido" suffix means "descendant, son of...", "chevalido" means "foal". If I say "chevalidino", that's a female descendant, or "filly". If I add the suffix "-ejo", that means "place of", so "chevalejo" is a stable. If I add "-isto", it means "the person who works with...", so "chevalisto" means "horseman", or "jockey". So you see that with one root word and a number of different additions, you can make any number of precisions.

Rob Can you tell us a phrase, an expression in Esperanto, a full sentence?

Alain "Estas mas facile parorira Esperanta limbron sin subjecto" (?)

Rob What are you doing to organise teaching in central Brittany?

Alain I've been in central Brittany a year and a half. I used to teach Esperanto at the university in Saint Brieuc, and when I came to live in Peumeurit-Quintin, as I wanted to live in the country, I decided to teach here in the village. I started a class, and I have 8 students, which isn't bad. I like to say, with a bit of a smile, that in this commune, 1 in 8 of the population is learning Esperanto. That's 5% of the population, which is amazing for the language!

Rob I hope that your success will continue!

Alain Thank you. Well, it's had a good start. They are already talking to one another in Esperanto, and as for next year, I've already got a lot of people who want to sign up.

Rob How do you say thank you in Esperanto?

Alain Dankon

Rob Dankon. Well, dankon Alain!

AB: Merci

