
GREETING ADDRESS

Dear colleagues / karaj gekolegoj,

It gives me great pleasure to send the warm greetings of European Esperanto Union (the umbrella organisation of the national Esperanto organisations in all 28 Member States of the EU) to the International Symposium on Language Education, Polyglottery and Geolinguistics in Moscow on 27–28 August 2018. My deepest thanks to Professor Grigory Kazakov for this opportunity to draw your attention to an interesting programme which is financed by the EU's ERASMUS +, the *Language Accelerator program 2018–19*.

The two-year *Language Accelerator* project, submitted by the Zagreb publisher Izvori and eight other EU partners, began last January. There are two partners from Croatia, three from Slovenia and one each from Germany, Denmark, Slovakia and Bulgaria. Two of the partners are universities and three are primary schools.

The aim of the project is to create didactic materials for an introductory one-year subject for primary schools (children aged eight or nine) to enable the children to learn new foreign languages more quickly and efficiently. The didactic materials are based on a very limited amount of Esperanto (the basic grammar and 250 most frequently-used morphemes) to give all of the children, particularly those who are less gifted linguistically, the experience of rapid success in language learning. Most importantly, foreign languages teachers currently teaching in the schools will be able to guide the *Language Accelerator* subject without knowing Esperanto themselves. One five-day seminar is sufficient for teachers to master the principles involved.

The course lasts for 64 hours. Experiments since 1921 on the use of a limited amount of propedeutical Esperanto have shown that after a one-year course the children tend to learn foreign languages more quickly. This has the potential to lead to better results than in current methods of language learning.

The didactic tools are based on the latest research, which has shown that a mere 250 of the most frequently used morphemes enable learners to understand 80% of everyday spoken Esperanto. This is because of the streamlined, transparent structure of the language, and its lack of exceptions, which lead to far faster success in language learning, and success for a far broader segment of learners. By mastering the different uses of these 250 morphemes, the children reach a deep understanding of the logic of languages in general and how they work. For this just half of the *Zagreb Method* textbook is used, which has already been published in most EU languages (see www.learn.esperanto.com). Three primary schools in Croatia, Slovenia and Bulgaria, and the *Interkulturo* company in Maribor are creating the necessary material (cartoons, image and memory games, songs and theatrical dialogues, speech exercises).

The University of Maribor, Slovenia, is evaluating the didactic tools and the results of introductory courses. *Interkulturo* and the University of Maribor are elaborating instructions for teachers with details on how to use the didactic tools, and they are being translated into the eight languages of the partners. The Danish university is working on software for question sentences adapted to the individual phases of the students for their home use. For the children's homework this software takes the place of the teacher and will continue to generate a limitless number of sentences that will stimulate the student to respond and converse.

In the last three months of the program the three schools involved will organize courses for the children to test the new didactic tools. The approximate cost of the program is €280,000.

One may reasonably ask why this program is based on Esperanto, rather than some other language. Professor Wim Jansen, formerly of the University of Amsterdam, mentions five factors peculiar to the language: 1) its regularity; 2) its transparency; 3) its lack of exceptions to grammatical rules; 4) the culture of the Esperanto-speaking community subsumes contributions from many other cultures; 5) Esperanto does not impose any particular models of thought or societal organisation, as other foreign languages tend to do.

The structure of Esperanto makes it a particularly good preparation for subsequent language study. Let us look at three levels:

- A. On the surface, at the level of vocabulary, Esperanto appears to be an inflected Indo-European language. It gleans most of its vocabulary from the Romance and Germanic languages, as does English. Many observers look no further than this, and thus miss the essential point.
- B. At the second, syntactical level, it is an agglutinative language, like Turkish, Hungarian and Finnish, e.g. *mal-san-ul-ejo* (hospital, literally “place for persons who are not in health”); *in-eco* (femininity, literally “female + quality”); morphemes are invariable – there is nothing like English “see, sight, visual”.
- C. At a deeper level, however, Esperanto is an isolating language, like Mandarin Chinese or Vietnamese, and unlike any Indo-European language. Its invariable morphemes can combine freely, and each can be used as an independent word, e.g. *male* – “on the contrary”; *sana* – “healthy”; *ulo* – “a person”; *ino* – “a female”, *ina* – “feminine”, *ine* – “in a feminine manner”; *-ejo*, “a place”; *-eco* forms all abstract nouns, and on its own means “quality”, e.g. *beleco*, *boneco*. Each morpheme can function as several parts of speech, simply by modifying the endings, e.g. the Chinese phrase “let the father act as a father, and the son as a son”, can be expressed in the four words of the original *Patro patru, filo filu*.

I would be very interested in any comments from participants in the Moscow Symposium, and will be happy to answer any questions sent to me by e-mail sean.oriain@dfa.ie.

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