

ELNA UPDATE

Esperanto League for North America, Inc. • Box 1129, El Cerrito, CA 94530 • (510) 653-0998

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WORLD LANGUAGE & WORLD LANGUAGE PROBLEMS

ENGLISH BUSINESSES NEED FOREIGN LANGUAGE SPEAKERS

The economic need to learn foreign languages has increased markedly in England. The English have been almost as notorious as Americans for not knowing other languages, but the coming economic integration of Europe, coupled with the rising power of Japan and other Asian countries, has made a knowledge of foreign languages critical. Unfortunately English schools are not producing enough students with a knowledge of foreign languages, especially languages of increasing importance, such as Japanese. This is in contrast to Australia, where Japanese is now the first foreign language in schools. 54,000 Australians are now learning Japanese, but the number of such students in England is only 300.

In a report titled "Foreign Language Needs of Business" Hilary Metcalf wrote this about the situation in England:

"The survey uncovered extensive unmet language needs. Of the companies with foreign business activities, all identified some unmet language needs for the language of their most important business contacts and 23 per cent said that lack of a particular language created a barrier to business."

Businesses have been slow to respond to this need, although John Courtis, a consultant, has noted an increase in demand for managers with language skills. "We have seen a 20 per cent increase during 1990-1 in the number of jobs where a language is preferred or essential. Unfortunately, fewer than 1 per cent of managers have fluency in a significant European language other than French." (*Life & Times*, Mar. 26, 1992)

ENGLISH-ONLY SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCES

Prof. Michel Guillemat of the University of Paris conducted research on the consequences

of having English-only scientific conferences. Guillemat carried out the study for the International Association of French-speaking Convention Cities. In France English is the only language at about 45% of scientific conferences. Guillemat found that about half of the scientists in a given field don't go to English-only scientific conferences because they do not speak English. He also found that those who do attend conferences and claim to know English can be broken up into three groups: 25% are native speakers; 20% of the non-native speakers can speak English; 55% can only understand spoken English, but are unable to speak it. The result is that the majority of scientists at such a conference can only participate passively. Only a small number of them can ask questions of the speakers, debate, defend their viewpoints or even follow the lectures. (*Heroldo de Esperanto*, Mar. 4, 1992)

PLAN TO REFORM ENGLISH SPELLING

The Simplified Spelling Society has developed Cut Spelling, another attempt to reform the chaotic spelling of English. Developed chiefly by Chris Upward, an academic who teaches at the University of Aston in Birmingham, Cut Spelling eliminates superfluous letters and substitutes letters closer to the actual sounds. Simplified Spelling Society president Bob Brown said that English has not had a consistent, coherent spelling system for 1,000 years and has not been reformed in 300 years.

English's difficult spelling can mean that children and foreigners take longer to learn to read and write English than those who learn more phonetic languages.

In a famous example of how illogical English spelling can be, George Bernard Shaw said that in English the word "fish" could be spelled "ghoti", using "gh" as in tough, "o" in women and "ti" in nation.

Upward is by no means the first person to try to reform English spelling. Many others, including Shaw himself and linguists such as Mario Pei, have developed plans to reform English spelling. So far none of the programs have met

with success, although the difficulty of English spelling is widely acknowledged. (San Francisco *Chronicle*, Apr. 19, 1992)

INTERNATIONAL ESPERANTO NEWS

ESPERANTO FOR EUROPE?

- Members of the international Radical Party recently joined together with some Esperantists to create the Esperanto Radical Association - Coordination for Democratic European Cultural Integration (ERA-KODO). Members of ERA-KODO oppose the use of English as the international language in Europe and elsewhere because they feel it threatens to destroy other languages. They believe that only the use of a neutral language such as Esperanto will preserve other languages. Special efforts are now underway in Europe by the Radical Party to make parliamentarians in the European Community countries aware of the role Esperanto can play, not only in preserving other languages but also in saving millions of dollars now spent on translators and interpreters.

ERA-KODO members believe Europe is the best place for such a campaign, because the approaching economic integration of the continent will make an international language increasingly important. The Radical Party believes that if English becomes the *de facto* language of the European community it will not only lead to the death of other national languages, but will also pose a grave threat to other cultures. Recently more than 40,000 legislators around the world received copies of the Radical Party's newsletter, *The New Party*, which included articles on the need for Esperanto and the position of the Radical Party on other issues. Members of ERA-KODO hope the publication will show legislators the need for Esperanto.

- Public support for Esperanto has also come from other groups and individuals in Europe. At the Episcopal European synod called by the Pope in the Vatican on Nov. 29, Rumanian bishop Györgi Jakubinyi raised some of the same points as ERA-KODO. "People also talk about language imperialism," he said. "The great nations want to impose their language together

with their culture and world-view. Latin would be a good solution, but today it is no longer utilized as it once was. What is needed, then, is an international artificial language which does not have a nation behind it. A suitable solution would be Esperanto."

- The Green Party delegate in the Italian Parliament posed a parliamentary question to the Minister for Education about the language problem of the European Community, and asked whether Esperanto should be examined as a possible solution. This was the first time such a question was asked in the Italian legislature.

- In a related story, 20 candidates for the Italian parliament recently ran on a purely Esperanto platform, the first time in history such a campaign occurred. The candidates publicly defended the right to communicate with the "democratic and linguistically ecological language Esperanto." Although none were elected, they did create great public interest. (*Heroldo de Esperanto*, 15 May 1992, *Esperanto*, Dec. 1991, Mar. 1992, *The New Party*, Feb. 1992)

ESPERANTO TO PROMOTE LITERACY

The World Esperanto Youth Organization (TEJO) recently launched a pilot project in Togoland to determine whether learning Esperanto can help illiterate children learn to read and write in their native languages more quickly. (Studies in England have already shown that children who studied Esperanto for two years and then French for two years had a better command of French than a control group of children who learned only French for four years.) The organization will work with the Coordinating Committee of the International Volunteer Service, and has also asked for financial support from UNESCO. 50 illiterate children aged 11 to 14 will be taught Esperanto and reading and writing in their native language. A control group will not learn Esperanto. Organizers hope that students will not only learn to read and write, but will also gain self-confidence and learn more about other cultures, especially when they begin to correspond in class with Esperanto students in other countries. (*Esperanto*, Feb. 1992)

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- ❖ The satisfaction of contributing materially to the propagation of Esperanto in the U.S.A.

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