
ELNA UPDATE

Esperanto League for North America • P.O. Box 1129, El Cerrito CA 94530 • (510) 653-0998 • Issue 2/1993

WORLD LANGUAGE & WORLD LANGUAGE PROBLEMS

LANGUAGES OF THE CARIBBEAN

Although English and French are the official languages of several Caribbean countries, both are losing ground to other languages. In Haiti, for example, Creole is understood by nearly 100% of the population, and is used daily by 85%. In Jamaica, where English is the official language, it is estimated that 90% of conversations are in Jamaican Patois. Use of Patois is increasing.

French is the only language used in Haitian schools, although only 15% of students speak French, which causes continuing problems in education. Students don't understand what is being taught, especially since many teachers speak French poorly. "That, along with the government's refusal to provide adequate facilities, trained teachers and proper subjects, dooms the country's population," said William Smarth, a Haitian Catholic priest. He and other Haitians want Creole to place a greater role in education.

French continues to be the language of the Haitian elite. Most government leaders give speeches in French. An exception was ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, which partly explains his continuing hold on the population. As a result, the Haitian elite continues to be opposed to expanding the role of Creole.

The situation is changing slightly, at least in the mass media. Although most magazines and newspapers are in French, radio is increasingly in Creole, as are some newspaper columns.

Linguists can't agree on whether Haitian Creole is a dialect of French or not. Some say it is, noting that 80% of the Creole vocabulary is French-based. According to this theory, African slaves who worked on Haitian plantations began to use a language derived from a dialect of French used by French seafarers called *boucaniers*. Other linguists believe that the slaves themselves transformed French into a common language they could communicate in, despite tribal and linguistic differences. In this theory, Creole has a largely French vocabulary but a syntax like that of African tribal languages such as Ewe and Wolof.

A native English speaker might have more success in understanding Jamaican Patois than a French speaker would with Creole. The English sentence "We haven't seen each other for a long time," becomes "Long time we no mek four-yai," in Patois, which corresponds to "For a long time, our four eyes haven't met."

Although Haitian Creole and Jamaican Patois are the best known examples, alternative languages are used in some other Caribbean countries, such as St. Lucia, Dominica and Grenada. In these officially English-speaking countries, the most widely-used languages are a form of Creole similar to Haitian Creole. (*Los Angeles Times*, May 11, 1993. Sent by Ed Schlesinger)

ENGLISH AS SHE IS SPOKE

●From a brochure at the Longmen Hotel in Shanghai: "You place at Shanghai first rate dancing hall: The atmosphere causes ladies sedate & charming, ever full noble aspiration is possessed by all gentlemen in a fantastic night. Go forward hand in hand, to be dignified and harmonious."

● From a sign in a Mexican hotel

room: "Dear guest, All facilities in this room are made for a comfortable stay in the hotel. In case of lost objects or bad use of the installations the maid should be affected (sic)." (*Wordmill*, May/June 1993)

MORE AMERICANS DON'T SPEAK ENGLISH

One out of seven people in the U.S. speaks a language other than English at home, a 35 percent increase since 1980, according to U.S. figures.

In California one in three people - 8.6 million - speaks a foreign language at home.

The study showed that 20% of the 35 million people who speak another language at home cannot speak English or speak it poorly.

Spanish is now the number two language in the U.S., with 17.3 million people speaking Spanish at home. That is ten times the number who speak the third most common language in the U.S., French.

Other languages used in U.S. homes, in descending order, are: German, Italian, Chinese, Tagalog, Polish, Korean, Vietnamese and Portuguese.

Most experts say immigrants want to and do learn English, but Cessna Winslow, spokeswoman for U.S. English, said use of multilingual ballots, welfare applications and other forms sends signals that immigrants don't need to learn English. (*San Francisco Chronicle*, May 23, 1993, *Charlotte Observer*, May 26, 1990)

INTERNATIONAL ESPERANTO NEWS

UPDATE ON ESPERANTO

Here are some facts about the current status of Esperanto in the world:

- The largest Esperanto dictionaries contain between 15,000 and 20,000 roots, from which over 150,000 words can be

formed. An Academy of Esperanto oversees the development of the language and a terminology center assists in the standardization and expansion of technical vocabulary.

- At least 16,500 pupils in 500 schools in 30 countries learn Esperanto every year. Many other people learn on their own, by correspondence, or through local Esperanto clubs. Some 107 universities in 23 countries offer courses in Esperanto, and several scholarly journals on Esperanto studies appear regularly. The Modern Languages Association of America's Annual Bibliography records over 300 scholarly articles on Esperanto a year.

- Over 100 international conferences and meetings are held each year in Esperanto - without translators or interpreters. Professional organizations also use Esperanto, including associations for doctors and medical workers, writers, railway workers, scientists, mathematicians, and musicians.

- Radio stations in Austria, Brazil, China, Cuba, Estonia, Hungary, Italy and Poland broadcast regularly in Esperanto. So does Vatican Radio. There are also occasional broadcasts by many other stations.

- Political interest in the language is increasing: it was a working language at the 1991 conference of the European Greens in Zurich, while several national Green parties and the Italian Radical party include support for Esperanto in their platforms. The Global Forum of non-governmental organizations in Rio de Janeiro, June 1992, adopted a call for the widespread use of Esperanto in the context of a global "ethical compromise".

- There is an extensive literature in Esperanto, both translated and original, covering all fields. Some 300 titles appear each year. Of the numerous literary translations published recently, titles include Umar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat*, Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*, and the 12th century Georgian epic *Knight in a Tiger-Skin*. (*An Update on Esperanto*, Universala Esperanto-Asocio, Jan. 7, 1993)

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ELNA Membership Benefits

- ❖ A bi-monthly newsletter keeping you up to date on issues of importance to Esperantists.
- ❖ The ELNA Book and Tape Service catalogs and the ELNA Membership List
- ❖ Discounts on most items carried by the ELNA Book and Tape Services
- ❖ The quarterly *ELNA Update* with information on the world language problem and Esperanto as its solution
- ❖ The satisfaction of contributing materially to the propagation of Esperanto in the U.S.A.

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A “Friend of Esperanto” is not a dues-paying member of ELNA and therefore not eligible for the regular membership benefits. Instead, a “Friend” offers encouragement to the Esperanto movement by providing financial support. A “Friend” receives:

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