



CULTURE COURSE

The Story of Esperanto

10 Chapters

Philip Osztromok

Generated with Claude

Contents

Chapter 1	What Is Esperanto?	2
Chapter 2	Białystok and the Dream	7
Chapter 3	Pioneers and the First Congress	12
Chapter 4	Schism and Ideals	17
Chapter 5	Between the Wars	22
Chapter 6	Persecution and Survival	27
Chapter 7	Cold War and Revival	32
Chapter 8	Esperantujo	37
Chapter 9	Does It Work?	42
Chapter 10	Testing the Legend	47

The Story of Esperanto

Course 1 · Chapter 1 · What Is Esperanto? Scope & Sources

Esperanto is the most successful planned language in history, and also one of the most misunderstood. It has been called a failure, a dream, a joke, a political threat and a quiet success, often by people who have never read a page of it. This course tells its story from the first booklet in 1887 to the present, as a way into the history of Europe, language, politics and community. It does not teach the language itself; Esperanto Grammar 1 does that. This first chapter explains what kind of language Esperanto is, gives you the words you will need, lists where the evidence comes from, and sets out six common claims that the last chapter will test. Names, dates and figures are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

What Kind of Language Is It?

A planned language

Most languages grew over centuries with no designer. Esperanto was designed, by one person, and published in 1887. Linguists call such a language *constructed* or *planned*.

Esperanto is one of hundreds, but it is the one that has been used the longest and by the most people (check).

An auxiliary language

Its stated aim was to be a *second* language for everyone, so that people with different mother tongues could meet on neutral ground. That aim is called an *international auxiliary language*. It is different from a language made for a story or a film, such as Klingon or Elvish (Chapter 9).

A language that lives

A planned language might be expected to stay on paper. Esperanto has speakers, congresses, books, songs and even a small number of people who grew up speaking it from birth (check). Whether that makes it "a real language" is a question for Chapter 9.

Why the history matters

The story of Esperanto is a way into some large subjects: how empires treated minority languages, why English became the world's common language, how a hobby movement can survive wars and dictatorships, and how people have tried to design peace. It is also a test case for how to judge a claim about a movement that has both fans and enemies, which is the method this course practises.

Words You Will Meet

Word	Meaning (check each)
<i>Esperanto</i>	Originally the pseudonym of the author, "Doktoro Esperanto", from a word meaning "one who hopes" (Chapter 2). It became the name of the language.
<i>Esperantisto</i>	A speaker of Esperanto, or a supporter of the movement. The two are not always the same.
<i>Esperantujo</i>	"Esperanto-land": the community of speakers, which has no territory (Chapter 8).
<i>Denaskulo</i>	A native speaker, someone who learned Esperanto from birth in the family (Chapter 8).
<i>Fundamento</i>	The "Foundation of Esperanto" of 1905, the set of texts that fixed the basic language (Chapter 3).
<i>La interna ideo</i>	"The inner idea": the hope for understanding and brotherhood between peoples that many early supporters saw as the purpose of the language (Chapter 4).
<i>Universala Kongreso</i>	The annual world congress of Esperanto speakers, first held in 1905 (Chapter 3). Often abbreviated UK, which is not the United Kingdom.
<i>UEA</i>	Universala Esperanto-Asocio, the Universal Esperanto Association, founded in 1908 (check) and now based in Rotterdam (check).

You can say them aloud with the rules in *Esperanto Grammar 1*, Chapter 1: each letter has one sound, and the stress is on the next-to-last syllable, so *Esperanto* is es-pe-**RAN**-to.

Where the Evidence Comes From

- **Zamenhof's own writings.** The *Unua Libro* (1887), the later textbooks and the *Fundamenta Krestomatio* of 1903, together with his speeches and letters (check). These are

first-hand, and were written to persuade.

- **The movement's records.** Congress programmes and reports, the yearbooks of the Universal Esperanto Association, and periodicals going back to the 1889 *La Esperantisto* (check). Rich and detailed, but written by supporters.
- **Memoirs and biographies.** By family, friends and followers. Vivid, and often repeating each other.
- **Historians and linguists.** Independent studies of the movement, including work on the persecution of Esperantists and on the language as language (check specific titles before citing, for example the history by Ulrich Lins of the "dangerous language").
- **Collections.** The Esperanto collections in Vienna, which are among the largest anywhere (check), and national libraries.
- **The language itself.** Texts in Esperanto, from poems to online encyclopedia articles, which show how it is actually used.
- **Critics.** Rival language designers, linguists, and governments that opposed the movement. They are needed for balance, and they too had interests.

Six Claims to Test

These are things people often say about Esperanto. The course returns to each of them. Do not accept or reject them yet; note the question a careful reader asks.

Common claim	The question a careful reader asks (check each)
Esperanto failed.	Failed at what? Compare its aims with what actually happened. (Chapters 5, 7, 9, 10)
Nobody speaks it.	How would you count speakers, and who has tried? (Chapter 8)
It was meant to replace all other languages.	What did the founder actually write? (Chapters 2 and 4)
It has no culture.	What books, songs, films and gatherings exist? (Chapter 8)
It is European only.	Where have speakers and congresses been, and what does the vocabulary come from? (Chapters 7, 8, 9)
The Nazis banned it because it was a Jewish plot.	What do the records show about the regime's actions and its reasons? (Chapter 6)

Map of the Course

Part	Chapters	Theme
Beginnings	2, 3	Białystok and the dream; the first movement and the first congress
Division and growth	4, 5	The Ido schism and Zamenhof's ideals; the years between the wars
Dark years and revival	6, 7	Persecution and survival; the Cold War and after
Today	8, 9	The community; does a planned language work?
Method	10	Testing the legend

A British comparison

Britain has its own part in the story: the British Esperanto Association was founded in the early 20th century (check), and the movement held a world congress in Edinburgh in 1926 (check). The Scottish poet William Auld became one of the best-known writers in the language (check). For an Edinburgh reader there is also a useful contrast with Scots and Scottish Gaelic, which are natural languages with their own debates about survival, and with English as the world's common language.

Check the details

Dates, numbers of speakers and "firsts" are easily repeated wrongly. Check them against the Universal Esperanto Association, historians' work and the original documents. This course describes the movement and its critics from published sources and does not recommend or discourage learning the language.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Pick two claims from the "Six Claims to Test" table and say what evidence you would look for and where you would find it.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Define "constructed language" and "natural language", then compare Esperanto with Scots or Scottish Gaelic on five points.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Choose three kinds of source from the chapter and, for each, say who made it, why, and how far it can be trusted for the history of Esperanto.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Esperanto:** a planned international auxiliary language, published in 1887 (check)
- **Words:** Esperantujo, esperantisto, denaskulo, Fundamento, interna ideo, Universala Kongreso, UEA
- **Sources:** the founder, the movement's records, memoirs, historians, collections, critics
- **Method:** describe the story, check the figures, test the claims
- **Language lessons:** *Esperanto Grammar 1*

The Story of Esperanto

Course 1 · Chapter 2 · Białystok and the Dream (1859-1887)

Every language has a past, but Esperanto is unusual because the beginning can be named: one young man, one town and one small book. This chapter follows Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof from his birth in Białystok to the publication of the Unua Libro (First Book) in 1887, and asks how much of the usual story is documented and how much has been added by later tellers. Names, dates and figures are from general knowledge and flagged "check". The people are discussed from published sources only.

The Town and the Family

A town of many tongues

Białystok, in the Russian Empire in the 19th century and today in north-eastern Poland, was a growing textile town where Poles, Russians, Germans, Belarusians and, in particular, Jews lived side by side (check). Jews were the largest group by the later 19th century (check). The people spoke different languages and, in Zamenhof's later account, often distrusted one another.

A family of teachers

Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof was born in Białystok on 15 December 1859 (check; the date is different in the old Russian calendar). His father, Markus, taught languages, and the family was Jewish and educated, speaking Russian at home, with Yiddish, Polish and German around them (check). Zamenhof himself later knew many languages, among them Russian, Polish, Yiddish, German, French, Latin and Hebrew (check).

A move to Warsaw

The family moved to Warsaw in the 1870s (check). Zamenhof attended school there, then studied medicine in Moscow and Warsaw and became an eye doctor (check). Warsaw was another multilingual city under Russian rule, in which Polish culture was under pressure from the authorities.

The town that explains the language?

Zamenhof wrote later that growing up in Białystok showed him how language divides people, and that this led him to think of a neutral second language. That is the usual story. It is based largely on his own later recollections, written long after the event, so it is best read as his account, and it needs the cross-checks in the notes below. It does not mean the explanation is untrue; it means that it is one source speaking for himself.

The Student Drafts

Date (check each)	Event
1859	Born in Białystok (15 December, new style).
1870s	The family moves to Warsaw; Zamenhof goes to school there.
1878	A first draft of a universal language, later called <i>Lingwe uniwersala</i> , is said to have been shown to school friends (check).
1879 to 1885	Medical studies in Moscow and Warsaw. His notebooks are left with his father (check).
1881	Anti-Jewish violence across parts of the Russian Empire; Zamenhof joins the early Zionist movement of the time and writes about it (check). His thinking about the language and about a wider humanism go on in parallel (Chapter 4).
1885 to 1887	Qualifies as a doctor, practises in several towns and works on a final version of the language (check).
1887	Marries Klara Silbernik (check) and publishes the <i>Unua Libro</i> in Russian in Warsaw, under the pseudonym "Doktoro Esperanto" (check).

One story, told in many biographies, says that his father burned the notebooks while Zamenhof was a student in Moscow, because he feared that the police would suspect the strange writing, and that Zamenhof then rebuilt the language from memory (check). It is a vivid tale. It is useful to ask who first told it, when, and whether any independent source supports it. Treat it as a "reported" story until you have seen the source (Chapter 10).

The Unua Libro of 1887

- **What it was.** A short pamphlet in Russian, soon followed by editions in Polish, French, German and other languages, with the aim that readers could learn the language in an afternoon (check).
- **What it contained.** A foreword explaining the aim, the pronunciation and the **sixteen rules** of grammar, a small vocabulary of roughly nine hundred roots, and sample texts such as a prayer, a letter and a poem (check). The rules are the ones you met in *Esperanto Grammar 1*, Chapter 1.
- **The method.** Fixed endings that mark each part of speech, building new words from roots with prefixes and suffixes (*Esperanto Grammar 1*, Chapter 5), and vocabulary drawn mostly from Romance, Germanic and, to a smaller extent, Slavic languages (check).
- **The name.** He signed as "Doktoro Esperanto", meaning "Dr One-Who-Hopes" (check), and users began to call the language itself *la lingvo de Doktoro Esperanto* and then simply Esperanto. The author's own name for it was "International Language" (check).
- **The gift.** Zamenhof declared that the language was not his property, and that anyone could use and write in it without paying him (check). That choice of an open, ownerless language was unusual for the time and helped it spread.
- **The money.** Printing was paid for with help from his father-in-law, a wealthy Kaunas merchant, according to most accounts (check).

Claim

What the sources support

"Zamenhof wanted to replace every national language."	His published statements, including the foreword to the 1887 book, describe Esperanto as a neutral second language to help people understand each other, not a replacement for mother tongues (check). The claim of replacement is a later accusation.
"The notebooks were burned by his father."	Repeated in biographies. Its original source and date need to be checked.
"He invented the whole language at once."	He worked on it for years, and the 1887 book was the result of repeated drafts and trials of translations (check). Later reforms to the vocabulary were refused (Chapters 3 and 4).

A British comparison

Nineteenth-century Edinburgh was not Białystok, but it was also a place where more than one language lived together. Scots, Scottish Gaelic and English were all heard in Scotland, and the schools of the period taught almost entirely in English (check). A comparison worth making is between a language movement that starts from conflict between

speakers, as in Białystok, and one that starts from the loss of a native language, as in the Gaelic revival. Białystok itself marked the 150th anniversary of Zamenhof's birth in 2009 by hosting the 94th Universal Congress of Esperanto (check), and there is a Zamenhof Centre in the town (check).

Check the details

Dates differ between the old Russian calendar and the modern one, and figures for the size of the town's groups depend on the census and the year. The quotations in biographies often come from letters written years later. The financing of the 1887 book and the notebook story rest on a small number of sources. Zamenhof and his family are discussed from published sources only.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

List the sources for the story that Białystok's divisions inspired Zamenhof, and for each say what kind of source it is and how far to trust it.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Compare the situation in Białystok in the 1860s with a place you know (Edinburgh or Scotland), covering the languages spoken, who held power, and what a language project could offer.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Write a 150-word account of how Esperanto began that separates what is documented, what Zamenhof said himself and what has been added by later writers.

Quick Reference

- **Founder:** L. L. Zamenhof, born in Białystok in 1859, an eye doctor (check)
- **First book:** the *Unua Libro*, Warsaw, 1887, sixteen rules and about 900 roots (check)
- **Name:** from the pseudonym "Doktoro Esperanto" (check)
- **Aim:** a neutral second language, owned by no one
- **Method:** separate documented facts from the founder's own later account and from stories repeated by others

The Story of Esperanto

Course 1 · Chapter 3 · Volapük, Pioneers and the First Congress (1879-1905)

A book is not a movement. Between the Unua Libro of 1887 and the first world congress of 1905, Esperanto grew from a pamphlet into an organisation with a journal, clubs, a hymn, a flag and a fixed foundation. This chapter begins with the language that came first and failed, Volapük, because its story shaped the way Esperanto's supporters thought about authority, and then follows the early clubs, a ban in Russia, and the congress at Boulogne-sur-Mer. Names, dates and figures are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

The Language That Came First: Volapük

A priest's invention

Volapük (from words meaning roughly "world speech") was published in 1879 by Johann Martin Schleyer, a German Catholic priest living in Baden (check). It spread through the 1880s, with clubs, journals and congresses in several countries, and its supporters claimed hundreds of thousands of learners (check). Treat those numbers with caution.

Why it declined

Writers give several reasons: a grammar and vocabulary that many learners found hard and that altered familiar words beyond recognition; the founder's refusal to allow changes; quarrels over who controlled the language and its academy; and the rise of a simpler rival (check). By the 1890s the movement had largely collapsed.

The lesson

Many early Esperantists came from Volapük, bringing its journals, its habits of organising and its memories of the collapse (check). They were determined that the new language would not depend on one person's authority.

Why did one survive?

The usual answer is "Esperanto was easier and its founder gave up control". It is a plausible explanation, and it is repeated in nearly every history. It is also a claim about causes, and causes are harder to prove than events. Other factors may have mattered too: timing, geography, the decline of a single movement's leaders, and the fact that Volapük had already exhausted the first wave of interest. Chapter 10 returns to this question.

Point (check each)	Volapük	Esperanto
Founder	Johann Martin Schleyer, a German priest	L. L. Zamenhof, a Warsaw eye doctor
Published	1879	1887
Control	The founder kept authority and resisted reform	The founder gave up ownership and later accepted a fixed foundation (see below)
Vocabulary	Roots from several languages but often altered heavily	Roots from Romance, Germanic and some Slavic words, usually closer to the original (check)
Peak	Late 1880s	Growing after the 1890s

The First Clubs and a Journal

- **The first learners.** The earliest Esperantists were in the Russian Empire, soon followed by Germany, Sweden, France and elsewhere (check). Many learned from the book in a few weeks and wrote to Zamenhof in the language.
- **Nuremberg.** A club in Nuremberg, founded in 1888, is often given as the first in Germany (check). In 1889 the city produced the first journal, *La Esperantisto*, edited by a local supporter, Leopold Einstein (check).
- **The Russian ban.** Most of the journal's subscribers were in Russia. When it published a piece by the novelist Leo Tolstoy, the Russian authorities banned its import around 1895, and the paper lost its readers (check). Tolstoy, who supported the language, is part of the story (check).
- **Translators and writers.** Zamenhof translated works such as *Hamleto* (Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, 1894), and the Polish engineer Antoni Grabowski (check) is often called the founder of Esperanto poetry; his translations helped to show that the language could carry literature.

- **The Fundamento.** In the 1890s Zamenhof published a textbook of exercises and a dictionary of roots in several languages. In 1905 these, together with the Fundamental Grammar, were collected as the **Fundamento de Esperanto** (check). They are the official basis of the language.
- **Symbols.** By the early 1900s the movement had a green flag with a white canton and a green star, and a hymn, *La Espero* (The Hope), written by Zamenhof (check).

Boulogne, 1905

The first Universal Congress

The first Universal Congress of Esperanto was held in Boulogne-sur-Mer, on the French side of the Channel, in August 1905. Roughly 700 people from some twenty countries attended (check). It was the first time many users of the language spoke it aloud to people from other countries.

The Declaration

The congress adopted the *Declaration on the Essence of Esperantism* (check). In summary: Esperantism is an effort to spread a neutral human language; it is not tied to any political or religious aim; the language belongs to nobody; and the Fundamento is the unchangeable basis.

Giving up authority

Zamenhof used the occasion to say that he was no longer the owner of the language but one of its users (check). By fixing the Fundamento, the movement tried to avoid the fate of Volapük, while leaving room for vocabulary to grow.

The Boulogne decisions explain two features of Esperanto that last to the present: a fixed core of grammar and roots that cannot be changed by one person, and an open vocabulary that can grow by use. They also explain why the movement later refused the reforms proposed by the supporters of Ido (Chapter 4).

A British comparison

The British Esperanto Association was founded in 1904 (check), the year before Boulogne, and British delegates travelled to the congress across the Channel. In 1907 the third Universal Congress took place in Cambridge (check), the first of several held in Britain. Edinburgh's turn came in 1926 (Chapter 5, check). British supporters in this period often presented the language as a tool for trade, travel and peace, not as a cultural project, which is a useful contrast with the Polish and Russian origins of the movement.

Check the details

Numbers of Volapük and Esperanto learners are partisan and not reliable. Dates of the first clubs and journals vary between sources. The wording and the number of points in the Boulogne Declaration should be read in the original text rather than from a summary. Names are used from published sources only.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Compare Volapük and Esperanto on five points, and say which difference you think mattered most for survival and what evidence you would want.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Summarise the Declaration of Boulogne in four points, and say what each promises and what it deliberately avoids.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Test the claim "Esperanto survived because it was easier than Volapük" with the evidence this chapter gives, and say what is missing.

Quick Reference

- **Volapük:** 1879, Schleyer; rose in the 1880s, declined by the 1890s (check)
- **First clubs:** Nuremberg 1888; journal *La Esperantisto* 1889 (check)
- **The ban:** Russian authorities and the Tolstoy article, 1890s (check)
- **Fundamento:** the fixed basis of the language, 1905 (check)
- **Boulogne:** first Universal Congress, August 1905, with the Declaration (check)

The Story of Esperanto

Course 1 · Chapter 4 · Schism, Reform and Zamenhof's Ideals (1907-1917)

After Boulogne the movement was confident, and then it split. This chapter looks at the rival language Ido and the quarrel over reform, at the founding of the Universal Esperanto Association, at the wider hopes of Zamenhof himself, and at the way the First World War ended the early period of the movement and, in 1917, its founder's life. It is a chapter about disagreement, and so about how to describe a quarrel fairly. Names, dates and figures are from general knowledge and flagged "check". The people are discussed from published sources only, and Zamenhof's religious and ethical ideas are described neutrally.

The Delegation and Ido

The Delegation

In 1900 the philosopher Louis Couturat and the mathematician Léopold Leau organised a Delegation to ask the world's scientific academies to adopt an international auxiliary language (check). A committee met in Paris in 1907 to choose one (check). It decided that no existing language was fully suitable, but accepted Esperanto "with reforms" proposed in a paper signed with a pseudonym, *Ido* (check).

The surprise

"Ido" is an Esperanto word meaning "offspring". The author turned out to be Louis de Beaufront, who had been one of Zamenhof's most important supporters in France (check). Many Esperantists felt betrayed. Zamenhof refused to accept the reforms as a replacement for the language (check).

The split

Couturat became the main champion of the new language, called Ido. It removed the accented letters and the accusative ending, dropped adjective agreement, and changed many roots to be more familiar to speakers of Romance languages (check). Ido took away a number of leading Esperantists, and

the two movements spent years arguing (check).

Reform or betrayal?

The two sides saw it differently. For the reformers, Esperanto had avoidable flaws and a better language was possible. For most Esperantists, the point of the Boulogne Declaration was that the Fundamento could not be changed by a committee, and that a language that kept changing would be useless. Both arguments are about principles, and the sources disagree about the motives of some people. An historian describes the dispute; a partisan decides who was right.

Point (check each)	Esperanto	Ido
Alphabet	28 letters with six accented ones	No accented letters
Accusative	Marked by <i>-n</i>	Used only when needed
Adjectives	Agree with the noun	Do not agree
Vocabulary	Roots from several European languages	More strictly chosen for similarity across Romance languages
Change	Fixed Fundamento; vocabulary grows by use	Designed to be revised by a committee

For the grammar being compared, see *Esperanto Grammar 1*, Chapters 2 and 3. Ido continued as a small movement, and still has a small number of users today (check). It is not the last reform proposal: others have followed in the 20th and 21st centuries (Chapter 9).

The Universal Esperanto Association

- **Founding.** In 1908 a young Swiss Esperantist, Hector Hodler, founded the Universal Esperanto Association (UEA) in Geneva (check). It was a body for individual members, to keep the movement together across countries.
- **The delegates.** UEA's early idea was a network of local "delegates", volunteers in towns around the world who would help travellers and answer questions (check). It was a forerunner of later hospitality networks (Chapter 7).

- **The yearbook.** A yearbook listed the delegates and their addresses, and made the movement a map as well as a language community (check).
- **The congresses.** After Boulogne the congresses went on every year, in places such as Geneva (1906), Cambridge (1907), Barcelona (1909), Washington (1910) and Kraków (1912) (check).

Zamenhof's Ideals

The inner idea

The *interna ideo* was the hope that a shared language would help people of different nations see each other as brothers (check). Zamenhof returned to it in speeches and in the hymn *La Espero*. Many early supporters shared it, and others said they cared only about the practical use of the language.

Hillelism

In 1901 and 1906 he published a proposal, called Hillelism after the Jewish teacher Hillel, to turn the shared moral teachings of Judaism into a basis for peace among peoples (check). The proposal did not attract a movement, and he later moved to a wider idea.

Homaranism

In 1913 he published a declaration of *Homaranismo* ("humanity-ism"), a call for a common ethical commitment among people of different religions and nations, without a new church (check). Some Esperantists were uneasy, because the Declaration of Boulogne had separated the language from any ideology (Chapter 3).

It is worth noticing that Zamenhof both held these hopes and signed the declaration that the movement should not be tied to them. How he kept the two apart is a matter on which historians offer different readings, and the sources are his speeches and publications, not a systematic statement.

War and a Death

Date (check each)

Event

1912	The Kraków congress; Zamenhof speaks on the inner idea.
1914	The Paris congress is cancelled as war breaks out; Zamenhof, travelling to it, is forced to turn back.
1914 to 1918	The First World War. Esperantists in neutral countries use the language to pass messages and trace missing people (check).
1917	Zamenhof dies in Warsaw, in April, aged 57 (check).

He did not live to see the war end. The movement lost its founder at the moment when the League of Nations, new borders and new ideas about international cooperation offered the chance to apply his hopes (Chapter 5). The shape of the movement, with a fixed core and an open community, was already in place.

A British comparison

The same years saw other attempts to reform language. In 1908 the Simplified Spelling Society was founded in London to modernise English spelling (check), and Andrew Carnegie, who was born in Dunfermline, funded a similar board in the United States (check). Like Ido, those projects argued that a language could be improved by design, and, like Ido, they met the objection that a language belongs to its users. For an Edinburgh reader, the contrast between a spelling-reform committee and a language that fixed its core in 1905 is a clear way to see what Boulogne decided.

Check the details

The history of the Delegation and Ido has been told mostly by partisans, so check the dates and the claims about motives against more than one account. The titles and dates of Zamenhof's writings on ethics should be checked against his own texts. Do not overstate his religious views: the sources are his published statements. Names are used from published sources only.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Argue each side of the reform dispute in four points: the case for the Ido reforms, and the case for keeping the Fundamento fixed. Then say which evidence would decide it.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

In about 100 words, explain the "inner idea" and Zamenhof's Hillelism and Homaranism, and say why some Esperantists were uneasy about them.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Test the claim "Ido nearly killed Esperanto" with the evidence in this chapter, and say what you would need to settle it.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Delegation and Ido:** 1907 committee; the pseudonym "Ido" and Louis de Beaufront (check)
- **UEA:** founded in Geneva in 1908 by Hector Hodler (check)
- **Ideals:** the inner idea, Hillelism (1901, 1906), Homaranism (1913) (check)
- **War:** the 1914 Paris congress cancelled; Zamenhof died in 1917 (check)
- **Method:** describe a dispute from both sides before judging it

The Story of Esperanto

Course 1 · Chapter 5 · Between the Wars: Hope and Politics (1918-1939)

The years after the First World War were the movement's most hopeful. The founder was dead, but the League of Nations was meeting in Geneva, new states had appeared, and many people wanted a way of understanding each other. Esperanto asked to be part of the answer, and failed to win official support, but it grew as a community, produced its first great poets, and held its biggest congresses. This chapter follows the hopes and the disappointments, including the congress held in Edinburgh in 1926. Names, dates and figures are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

The League of Nations

The proposal

In 1920 and 1921 the League of Nations, the new international body based in Geneva, looked at Esperanto. A report by the Secretariat was favourable, and at the 1921 Assembly delegates from about a dozen countries proposed that Esperanto be taught in schools (check). The Japanese official Nitobe Inazō, who was a senior member of the League's staff and had attended an Esperanto congress, supported the idea (check).

The opposition

The French delegation opposed it, and is generally said to have blocked the proposal because French was then the leading language of diplomacy (check). Later resolutions were weaker, encouraging international languages teaching in general without naming Esperanto as the choice (check).

The result

The League never adopted Esperanto. Supporters concluded that governments would not accept a neutral language that took status from their own, and turned back to building the community (check). It is an early example of a recurring pattern: strong

support from individuals, and caution from states.

Why did the League say no?

The usual explanation is French opposition, which is well attested in accounts of the debates. It is not the only possible explanation. Governments may also have feared a language no state controlled, the League had many other priorities, and the practical case for a new language was hard to prove. A careful account gives the French role and says that the full reasons are debated.

Two Esperantos?

Body (check each)

Outlook

Universal Esperanto
Association (UEA)

Neutral: the language belongs to everyone, and the association takes no side on politics. Its members ranged from teachers to civil servants and religious believers.

SAT (Sennacieca Asocio
Tutmonda, "Worldwide
Anational Association"),
1921

Founded by the French teacher Eugène Adam, who wrote as Lanti. It was a movement of workers and the left, which argued that neutrality was an illusion and that Esperanto should serve the labour movement and be "anational".

Religious and other groups

Catholic, Protestant, Bahá'í, pacifist and other organisations used Esperanto for their own meetings and publications (check).

The Soviet Union

In the 1920s the state allowed an Esperanto association and the language was encouraged for international propaganda; attitudes changed in the 1930s (Chapter 6, check).

The disagreement was an old one in new clothes. The Declaration of Boulogne (Chapter 3) said Esperantism had no political programme, but nothing stopped Esperanto speakers from having views. SAT was the answer of those who saw the language as a tool for working people rather than diplomats. The two organisations coexisted, argued and sometimes shared members (check).

A Literature of Its Own

- **Original writing.** Until the 1920s most Esperanto literature was translation. After the war, poets began to write directly in the language and to treat it as a literary medium, with its own metres and style (check).
- **The Budapest school.** Around the Hungarian doctor and poet Kálmán Kalocsay, and the journal *Literatura Mondo* published in Budapest, a group of writers developed a polished style, among them the actor and poet Julio Baghy (check). Kalocsay's collections of the 1920s and 1930s are often named as turning points (check). If you studied *Hungarian Grammar 1*, you will find that Hungarian writers shaped the early literature of an international language, a striking fact for a language with no country.
- **Reference works.** Kalocsay worked with the French scholar Gaston Waringhien on an anthology and a guide to Esperanto verse in the early 1930s (check), a sign that the language had traditions of its own.
- **Biography and history.** Edmond Privat, a Swiss writer, published a life of Zamenhof in 1920 that shaped the picture of the founder for decades (check).
- **Periodicals, radio and schools.** The interwar period saw many journals, the first radio broadcasts in Esperanto (check) and courses in some schools and evening classes, though never as a national policy (check).

Edinburgh, 1926

The congress

The 18th Universal Congress of Esperanto was held in Edinburgh in 1926 (check). It was organised with the British Esperanto Association and local supporters, and brought several thousand participants from many countries (check).

What it shows

A world meeting in the Scottish capital in the 1920s is a reminder that the language movement was not only Central European. British organisers presented it as a practical help for travel, trade and peace, and the Scottish press covered it (check).

What to check

Details of attendance, the venues and the programme should come from the congress report, newspapers and the British Esperanto Association's records, not from later summaries.

A British comparison

Britain at this time was also experimenting with international institutions: the League of Nations itself, the BBC (founded in 1922, with a vision of cultural and educational broadcasting, check), and international scouting and sports meetings. Esperanto's Edinburgh congress fits that picture of a Britain that was open to international organisations while remaining firmly an English-language country. A useful exercise is to look at how an Edinburgh newspaper of 1926 describes the congress, and to ask what the writer assumed the readers knew.

Check the details

The record of the League debates comes from delegates' accounts, newspapers and later histories that sometimes disagree about who said what. Numbers of Esperanto speakers and congress attendance in the 1920s and 1930s are estimates. Names of poets and works should be checked against bibliographies. The people discussed are named from published sources only.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Give three reasons why the League of Nations might have refused to adopt Esperanto, and for each say what evidence would show that it was a real reason.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Compare the neutral UEA and the worker-oriented SAT: what they believed about the language and about politics, and what each risked.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Explain why original writing in Esperanto mattered more to the language's reputation than translation, and what the Budapest school shows.

→ [Solution](#)

Quick Reference

- **League of Nations:** proposal of 1921, blocked, French opposition reported (check)
- **SAT:** founded 1921 by Eugène Adam (Lanti), a worker and anational movement (check)
- **Literature:** Kalocsay, Baghy and the Budapest school; *Literatura Mondo* (check)
- **Edinburgh:** the 18th Universal Congress, 1926 (check)
- **Method:** separate what happened from why; the reasons are often debated

The Story of Esperanto

Course 1 · Chapter 6 · Persecution and Survival (1930s-1945)

A language with no state, members in every country and a Jewish founder was always going to look suspicious to regimes that demanded loyalty to a single nation or party. This chapter covers the 1930s and the Second World War, when Esperantists were watched, banned and, in some places, imprisoned or killed. It is a short chapter on purpose. The subject is serious, the record is partly incomplete, and the aim is to say what the published sources support, no more and no less. It does not describe violence in detail. Names, dates and figures are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

Why Was It Seen as a Threat?

No state, no master

Dictatorships want people's first loyalty to be the nation or the party. A language and a network that cut across borders, with correspondents abroad, could be read as a rival loyalty, or as a cover for spying (check).

Internationalism and pacifism

Many Esperantists were pacifists, socialists, religious believers or simply internationally minded. That was enough to attract attention from regimes that distrusted all three (check).

A Jewish founder

Zamenhof's Jewish background was used by antisemitic writers to claim that Esperanto served a Jewish plan. Hitler's *Mein Kampf* is usually cited as mentioning Esperanto in that kind of argument (check the exact passage). The claim is propaganda, not evidence.

Testing the sixth claim

Chapter 1 listed the claim "The Nazis banned it because it was a Jewish plot". The published record supports a more careful version. Esperanto societies in Germany were dissolved in the 1930s, and the regime's propaganda did link the language to Jews and to

internationalism (check). But historians also describe a mixture of reasons: distrust of anything international, pacifist and socialist members, foreign contacts, and the founder's background. "Banned" is also too simple, because policy varied by period and place and some officials considered using the language (check). A good account gives the documented bans and says that motives were several.

What Happened, Region by Region

Place (check each)	What the sources report
Germany	After 1933 the movement lost its freedom to operate. The German Esperanto Association was dissolved in 1936, and local groups were closed or placed under suspicion (check). Individuals who stayed active, especially if Jewish or on the left, faced persecution.
Soviet Union	After a period of official tolerance in the 1920s, attitudes turned in the 1930s. During the purges of 1937 and 1938 many Esperantists were arrested, the Soviet Esperanto Union was closed, and some were executed or died in camps (check). Contact with foreigners, which Esperanto encouraged, was itself dangerous.
Occupied countries	Esperanto groups were closed in occupied Poland and elsewhere, and members were among those arrested (check). The record is patchy.
Fascist Italy, Spain and Portugal	Movements were restricted or banned at various times (check).
Other places	The picture differs by country and year. Esperanto survived and sometimes grew in places outside these regimes (check).

The Zamenhof Family

- **The facts.** Zamenhof died in 1917, before any of this. His children and many other relatives lived on in Poland, where the Jewish community was murdered in the Holocaust. His son Adam, a doctor, and his daughters Zofia and Lidia are reported to have been killed in 1940 and 1942 (check each).

- **How to write about it.** State the public record briefly and with respect. Avoid detail that the sources do not give, and avoid turning individuals into symbols. Lidia Zamenhof had become a Bahá'í and an Esperanto speaker and teacher, and her story is often told in the movement (check).
- **Why it belongs here.** It shows that the same person's family could stand for the ideal of the language and become victims of the kind of nationalism the language was meant to oppose. It does not show that Esperanto was the reason they were persecuted.

Survival

A movement in many countries

Because no state controlled it, the movement could not be closed down everywhere. Groups continued in neutral countries and in exile (check), and the Universal Esperanto Association in Geneva kept going, though its activities were reduced during the war.

Quiet use

Reports mention Esperanto used in letters between countries, in prisoner and refugee circumstances, and in underground meetings (check). Accounts of individuals using it to communicate under pressure are told in memoirs, which need to be checked against other evidence.

The cost

Many leading figures died, the congresses stopped after 1939 (check), and records and libraries were lost or scattered. The post-war revival (Chapter 7) was rebuilt on what remained.

A British comparison

Britain was at war with Germany from 1939 and could not host a congress, but its Esperantists were not persecuted by the state, so the British story is different. It is about keeping a society alive, helping refugees and corresponding where possible (check). A fair comparison is with Scottish and British pacifist and internationalist groups of the time, many of which also lost members to war work or were watched by the authorities.

Comparing the British experience with the Soviet and German ones shows how much depended on the political system.

Check the details

Figures for people killed or imprisoned vary widely and are incomplete. Dates of bans differ between countries and between sources. Stories of individuals come from memoirs and later retellings. For this chapter in particular, prefer historians' studies (for example Ulrich Lins's work on the "dangerous language", check) to summaries online, and treat any claim that "the Nazis tried to wipe out Esperanto" or that "nothing happened" as too simple.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Give three reasons why dictatorships distrusted Esperanto, and for each say what evidence would show that it was a real reason and not only propaganda.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Rewrite the claim "The Nazis banned Esperanto because it was a Jewish plot" as a more careful statement that the sources support.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Explain how a movement with no state and members in many countries could survive, and name two things it lost that it could not replace.

→ [Solution](#)

Quick Reference

- **Why suspected:** no state, international contacts, pacifist and left members, a Jewish founder (check)
- **Germany:** societies dissolved, German association closed in 1936 (check)
- **Soviet Union:** tolerance in the 1920s, arrests in 1937 and 1938 (check)
- **Zamenhof's family:** children killed in 1940 and 1942, stated briefly (check)
- **Method:** "banned" is a claim to qualify; separate documented acts from motives

The Story of Esperanto

Course 1 · Chapter 7 · Cold War and Revival (1945-1989)

The war left the movement smaller, older and scattered, yet within a few years the congresses were back and new members were joining. The Cold War divided Europe, and Esperanto, a language that crossed borders, had to find a place on both sides of the Iron Curtain. This chapter follows the rebuilding, the attempts to win recognition from international bodies, the growth of the community in the East and in Asia, and a handful of events that gave the language new visibility. Names, dates and figures are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

Rebuilding

The congresses resume

Universal Congresses started again soon after the war, from 1947 (check), in places such as Bern and Vienna. Attendance was lower than in the 1920s, and many old faces were missing (Chapter 6).

A new base

The Universal Esperanto Association moved its headquarters to Rotterdam, in the Netherlands, where it remains (check). Its yearbook, magazine and network of local representatives were rebuilt, and the postwar generation joined youth organisations (check).

Attitudes change

In the Soviet Union the suspicion of the 1930s eased after Stalin's death in 1953, and Esperanto groups were again allowed in parts of the Eastern bloc under supervision (check). In the West, the movement operated freely but remained small.

Recovery or invention?

It is easy to describe the postwar years as a revival, as if the old movement came back unchanged. The sources suggest something more mixed: the movement changed in size,

age, geography and aims, and many of the postwar members had never known the prewar world. Historians usually talk of a rebuilt movement, not a restored one.

Seeking Recognition: UNESCO

Date (check each)	Event
1954	The UNESCO General Conference, meeting in Montevideo, adopts a resolution noting the results achieved by Esperanto in international intellectual exchange and the rapprochement of peoples, and allowing cooperation with the Universal Esperanto Association.
1985	A later UNESCO resolution, at Sofia, recognises the aims of Esperanto and encourages member states to introduce its study (check).
Other	Petitions and resolutions at the United Nations and the Council of Europe did not lead to official adoption (check).

The 1954 resolution is a favourite of Esperantists, and it is real, but its wording is mild: it records achievements and allows consultation. Neither resolution made Esperanto an official language of any body. A fair statement is that UNESCO gave the movement formal recognition as an organisation worth working with, which is not the same as endorsing the language for adoption (check the texts).

Growth in the East and in Asia

- **Hungary and Eastern Europe.** Hungary became a stronghold in the Cold War, with active clubs, publications and state-recognised language examinations (check). Poland, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and others also hosted congresses (check).
- **China.** Esperanto had been used in China since the early 20th century and was promoted by some reformers and writers (check). After 1949 the state supported international broadcasts and a magazine in the language (check), though the Cultural Revolution interrupted activity from the 1960s (check).
- **Japan and Korea.** Japan had one of the oldest and largest groups, connected in part with the religion Oomoto, which promoted the language (check). The Japanese Esperanto Institute and congresses continued after the war (check).

- **Why this matters.** The notion that Esperanto is "European only", one of the six claims in Chapter 1, is hard to square with the movement's strength in East Asia, though its vocabulary remains largely European in origin (Chapter 9).

Visibility and Community

Pasporta Servo

The "Passport Service", begun in 1974, is a network of Esperanto speakers who offer a bed to travelling Esperantists (check). It is often called one of the oldest hospitality exchange networks, a descendant of the delegate idea of 1908 (Chapter 4, check).

Incubus (1966)

A horror film shot entirely in Esperanto, starring William Shatner, shot in California and released in 1966 (check). It was largely forgotten, then rediscovered, and is a curiosity of cinema and of language history. Reviews of the actors' Esperanto vary, so check what native speakers wrote.

The centenary of 1987

The hundredth anniversary of the *Unua Libro* was marked by a congress in Warsaw, Zamenhof's city, with participants from many countries (check). It was a landmark of recovery: a congress of thousands in Poland at the end of the Cold War.

Literature and Argument

- **William Auld.** A Scottish poet who wrote in English and Esperanto, Auld published *La infana raso* (The Infant Race) in 1956 (check), a long poem often named among the major works in the language. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature several times in the 1990s and after, according to published accounts (check).
- **The debate.** Postwar Esperantists argued about "final victory" (the idea that the language would one day be adopted worldwide) and about whether to concentrate on practical uses. The Prague Manifesto of 1996 later set out aims for the movement (check; it is outside this chapter's dates).

- **Younger members.** Youth organisations and summer schools gave the language a base outside the older generation (check).

A British comparison

Britain after 1945 was rebuilding too, with new international bodies such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe, and a slowly growing role for English as a working language. The British Esperanto Association hosted a world congress in Harrogate in 1954 (check), and Scots such as William Auld took a leading part in the movement's writing. Compare the movement's approach to institutions with the way Gaelic and Scots were being treated in Scottish schools at the time, and ask which depended more on official recognition.

Check the details

Congress locations and dates, the years of UNESCO resolutions and the first dates of Pasporta Servo and the film should be checked against the Universal Esperanto Association, UNESCO's records and film histories. Speaker estimates for this period are unreliable. Claims about the Cold War from either side should be read critically, because Eastern and Western sources both had reasons to praise or to dismiss the movement.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Summarise what the UNESCO resolutions of 1954 and 1985 did and did not do, and explain how a supporter and a sceptic might each describe them.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Use the chapter to answer the claim "Esperanto is European only", giving two pieces of evidence for and two against, and say what is still missing.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Choose Pasporta Servo, *Incubus* or the 1987 centenary and write 120 words on what it shows about the movement, with one detail to verify.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Rebuilding:** congresses from 1947, UEA in Rotterdam (check)
- **UNESCO:** 1954 Montevideo and 1985 Sofia resolutions, recognition without adoption (check)
- **East and Asia:** Hungary, Poland, China and Japan as centres (check)
- **Visibility:** Pasporta Servo (1974), *Incubus* (1966), Warsaw centenary (1987) (check)
- **Method:** separate recognition from adoption, and rebuilding from restoring

The Story of Esperanto

Course 1 · Chapter 8 · Esperantujo: A Community Without a Country

Esperantujo, "Esperanto-land", has no land. It has an annual world congress, a publishing trade, songs and festivals, a few families who speak the language at home, and a large online presence. This chapter looks at what that community is like today: how many people belong to it (the hardest question), what the congresses, books and music are like, how the internet changed things, and where Scotland and Britain fit. It follows the claims "Nobody speaks it" and "It has no culture" from Chapter 1. Names, dates and figures are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

How Many Speakers?

Why it is hard

There is no census of Esperanto. Speakers learn it informally, at different levels, and "speaking" can mean anything from a few phrases to fluency. Membership figures for associations count only those who join. Every estimate rests on assumptions (check).

The published range

Estimates in the literature run from tens of thousands of active speakers to a couple of million with some knowledge, and some are higher (check). A careful writer gives the range, says who made each estimate and how, and does not choose a number to suit an argument.

What would help

Surveys that define their terms, tested samples of learners and independent figures such as exam entries and congress attendance. Online course data show interest but not use (check).

Testing "Nobody speaks it"

The claim is false if "nobody" is meant literally: there are people who use it daily, hold meetings in it and write books in it. It is true that Esperanto is a small language compared with the largest natural languages, and that it has no country where it is the main

language. A careful statement is "a small, widely scattered community, whose size is uncertain".

Native Speakers: *Denaskuloj*

- **What the word means.** A *denaskulo* is someone who learned Esperanto from birth, usually because parents of different mother tongues used it as their shared language (check).
- **How many.** Published estimates are in the hundreds to low thousands, and they are not firm (check). The count depends on who is asked and what counts as "native".
- **Why it matters.** Linguists have studied them to see whether a planned language develops as natural languages do, with sound changes, new idioms and variation. Findings are limited by the small number of speakers (check).
- **A caution.** Native speakers are private people. Name them only if their own published work or consent makes them public, and prefer general descriptions.

Gatherings, Books and Songs

Area (check each)	What exists
Congresses	The Universal Congress meets every year in a different country, with attendance usually in the high hundreds to low thousands, and there are regional, youth and specialist meetings. The language is used for programmes, lectures and informal talk.
Publishing	Small presses, magazines and a book service, with new titles each year. There are original novels and poetry and a large body of translation, including classic works into Esperanto and, less often, from it.
Poetry	Among the best-known poets are William Auld (Chapter 7) and the English poet Marjorie Boulton (check).
Music	Bands and singers perform in the language, and a festival tradition exists in Europe (check). Quality and taste vary, as in any scene.
Broadcasting	Radio programmes and podcasts in Esperanto, some from national broadcasters in the past (check).

Area (check each)

What exists

Reference Dictionaries, an academy that advises on usage (check) and a standard grammar, the *Plena Gramatiko* (check).

This is the evidence against "It has no culture". It does not prove that the culture is large or that it is read outside the community. A fair verdict is that it has culture of its own, small in scale.

The Internet Era

Esperanto Wikipedia

The Esperanto edition of Wikipedia began in 2001 (check) and has hundreds of thousands of articles (check the current figure). Its quality varies, and it is a source of everyday vocabulary and a place where the language is used for writing about the world.

Learning online

Free courses, apps and forums made it easy to start. A Duolingo course launched in the mid-2010s brought a large number of new learners, though many stop early (check).

A scattered community

Chat groups and social media allow speakers in different continents to talk daily. The community has become more global and less tied to clubs, but also harder to count (check).

Esperanto in Scotland and Britain

- **Associations.** The British Esperanto Association (1904, Chapter 3) and a Scottish Esperanto organisation exist; check the current names and activity before citing (check).
- **William Auld** (1924-2006, check), a Scot, was one of the most admired poets in the language, a translator and a nominee for the Nobel Prize in Literature (Chapter 7, check).
- **Edinburgh and congresses.** The world congress of 1926 (Chapter 5) was held in Edinburgh. Later British congresses have taken place in other cities (check).
- **Everyday use.** Local groups, courses at festivals and libraries, and online meetings (check).

A British comparison

Compare Esperantujo with another community defined by language and not territory: the Scottish Gaelic and Scots communities have a land but are scattered by migration and spread online; Esperantujo has no land and only the language. Both argue about numbers, about how many are fluent, and about passing the language to children. A good question for an Edinburgh reader is: what does a language need to count as "alive"?

Check the details

Figures for speakers, native speakers, congress attendance and articles change every year, so quote them with a date and a source. Distinguish enthusiasts' claims from independent surveys. Names of living musicians, writers and speakers should come from their own public work only.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Write a paragraph on how many people speak Esperanto that gives a range, explains why it is uncertain, and says what evidence would improve it.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Use the chapter to answer "Esperanto has no culture": list the evidence for and against, and give your verdict in one sentence.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Compare Esperantujo with the Scottish Gaelic community on territory, children learning the language, numbers, and the effect of the internet.

Quick Reference

- **Speakers:** uncertain; quote a range with sources (check)
- **Native speakers:** *denaskuloj*, hundreds to low thousands (check)
- **Culture:** congresses, publishing, poetry, music, broadcasting (check)
- **Internet:** Wikipedia since 2001, online courses, global chat (check)
- **Scotland:** William Auld, the 1926 congress, local groups (check)

The Story of Esperanto

Course 1 · Chapter 9 · Does a Planned Language Work?

After eight chapters of history, this one asks the question directly: does a planned language do what its designer hoped? "Work" can mean several things, being neutral, being easy, being used, or being a real language, and the answer is different for each. The chapter takes four tests in turn, then compares Esperanto with its rivals and relatives. It follows the claims "Esperanto failed" and "It is European only" from Chapter 1. Names, dates and figures are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

Four Tests

1. Is it neutral?

The aim was a language that belonged to nobody. Its roots come mostly from Romance and Germanic languages, with some Slavic, and its grammar, with its sentence structure and its idioms, will feel more familiar to Europeans than to speakers of other language families (check). Most linguists would say it is less neutral than hoped, though more neutral than any single national language.

2. Is it easy?

Regular grammar, a small set of affixes and one sound per letter make it quicker to learn for many people than a natural language, especially for those who already know a European language (check). Claims such as "ten times faster" come from supporters and small studies, and should be treated as claims (check).

3. Is it used?

Yes, by a small community (Chapter 8). It has never been adopted by a state or an international body as a working language, which is what its founders hoped for (Chapters 5 and 7).

4. Is it a real language?

Linguists generally say that a language that people use for everyday life, with native speakers, new words and idioms, is a language, whatever its origin (check). Esperanto meets those tests on a small scale (Chapter 8).

Testing "Esperanto failed"

The answer depends on the aim. As a replacement for English, German or French in world affairs, it did not succeed. As a second language adopted by governments, it did not succeed. As a living community that has lasted more than 130 years through wars and bans, with a literature and a congress, it has outlived almost every other planned language. "Failed" and "succeeded" are both too simple; the careful statement names the aim.

Criticism and Reform

Issue (check each)	The debate
Accents and letters	The six accented letters are awkward on keyboards. The "x-system" (writing <i>cx</i> for <i>ĉ</i>) is a common workaround and a standard keyboard layout is now easy to install.
Gender	The language makes female words from male roots with <i>-ino</i> (for example <i>frato</i> , brother, and <i>fratino</i> , sister), which some find unequal. Proposals include the pronoun <i>ri</i> for "he or she" and other forms, with continuing disagreement about whether to adopt them.
Vocabulary	Critics say roots favour European languages. Defenders say the language must be learnable by the largest number of learners, and that it can add words freely.
Reform	The Ido split (Chapter 4) was the biggest reform attempt, and later ones, such as <i>Riism</i> in the 1990s, did not win wide support (check). The Fundamento (Chapter 3) still defines the core.
Change by use	The language does change in practice: new words, shifting idioms and the Academy's advice, so it is not frozen (check).

For the grammar behind these points, see *Esperanto Grammar 1*, Chapters 3 and 5.

Comparing Planned Languages

Language (check each)	Purpose	What happened
Volapük (1879)	International auxiliary language	Rose and collapsed within about a decade (Chapter 3).

Language (check each)	Purpose	What happened
Esperanto (1887)	International auxiliary language	A community of speakers, with a history of 130+ years.
Ido (1907)	A reformed Esperanto	A small community remains (Chapter 4).
Interlingua (1951)	A language that Romance-language speakers can read without study	Built from an international research project (IALA); small but active (check).
Klingon (1980s)	An artistic language for a fictional people	Created for film and television, with a fan community that learns it (check). Not meant for general communication.
Toki Pona (2001)	A minimal language of a few hundred words, designed to simplify thought	A small, online community (check).

The comparison shows that "constructed language" covers very different aims. Esperanto belongs with Volapük, Ido and Interlingua as an auxiliary language, and Klingon and Toki Pona have other goals. Esperanto is not a failure by their standards, and they are not failures by its.

Versus English as a Common Language

- **The fact.** English has become the main language of international business, science and travel, which is the role Esperanto's founders imagined for a neutral language (check).
- **Esperantist objections.** English gives native speakers an advantage and takes years to learn well; supporters call the situation unfair (check).
- **The other side.** English works because hundreds of millions already use it, and the cost of changing is very high. Most learners go where the people already are.
- **An honest summary.** Esperanto did not stop English becoming the world's common language, and it lost that argument in practice. Whether the argument was wrong is a matter of values as well as evidence.

A British comparison

For a speaker of English in Edinburgh, the comparison is uncomfortable and useful: English is the language that "won" the role Esperanto wanted. The same history gave Scots and Gaelic speakers an experience of how a dominant language treats others (Chapter 2).

A good question is whether a neutral language is fair to those who already have an advantage, and what native English speakers lose and gain from a world that learns their language.

Check the details

Studies on how quickly Esperanto is learned are small and sometimes funded by supporters, so read the design before the headline. Statements about "most linguists" should be tied to named sources. Claims about the vocabulary percentages from each language family vary with the method of counting.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Score Esperanto on the four tests (neutral, easy, used, real language) as "mostly yes", "partly" or "mostly no", and justify each score in one sentence.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Choose two planned languages from the comparison table and explain how "did it work?" has a different answer for each because the aims differ.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Write a balanced 150-word reply to the question "Why not just use English?", giving the best argument on each side.

→ [Solution](#)

Quick Reference

- **Four tests:** neutral, easy, used, real language
- **Neutrality:** less than hoped, more than a national language (check)
- **Ease:** regular grammar helps; "ten times faster" is a claim (check)
- **Comparisons:** Volapük, Ido, Interlingua, Klingon, Toki Pona (check)
- **Method:** name the aim before saying a project failed or succeeded

The Story of Esperanto

Course 1 · Chapter 10 · Capstone: Testing the Legend

Chapter 1 set six claims about Esperanto and promised to return to them. This final chapter does that. It first puts the story on one timeline, then tests each claim against what the course has shown, then gives a six-question method you can use on any story about a language, a movement or a famous "fact". The aim is not to defend Esperanto or to dismiss it, but to show how to describe it accurately. Names, dates and figures are from general knowledge and flagged "check".

The Story on One Page

Date (check each)	Event	Chapter
1859	Zamenhof born in Białystok	2
1879	Volapük published	3
1887	The <i>Unua Libro</i> published in Warsaw	2
1905	First Universal Congress at Boulogne; the Fundamento	3
1907 to 1908	The Ido schism; the Universal Esperanto Association founded	4
1917	Zamenhof dies	4
1920 to 1921	League of Nations proposal blocked; SAT founded	5
1926	World congress in Edinburgh	5
1930s to 1945	Bans and persecution; the congresses stop	6
1954 and 1985	UNESCO resolutions	7
1987	Centenary congress in Warsaw	7
2001 onward	Esperanto Wikipedia and online learning	8

The Six Claims, Tested

Claim from Chapter 1	What the evidence supports (check each)	A careful version
Esperanto failed.	It was not adopted by governments or international bodies (Chapters 5, 7), but it has	"It did not become a world language, and it did become

Claim from Chapter 1	What the evidence supports (check each)	A careful version
	lasted over 130 years, through bans and wars (Chapter 6), with an active community (Chapter 8).	a lasting small community."
Nobody speaks it.	The number is uncertain, from tens of thousands of active speakers to more in the broader range, including a few native speakers (Chapter 8).	"A small, scattered community of uncertain size."
It was meant to replace all other languages.	The founder described it as a neutral second language (Chapter 2). Some supporters hoped for wide adoption, but replacement of mother tongues was not the stated aim.	"It was designed as a second language for international use."
It has no culture.	Congresses, poetry, publishing, music and online life exist, on a small scale (Chapters 5 and 8).	"It has a culture of its own, small and mostly shared inside the community."
It is European only.	Vocabulary is mostly European, but strong groups exist in Asia and members in all continents (Chapters 7 and 9).	"European in origin and vocabulary, worldwide in membership."
The Nazis banned it because it was a Jewish plot.	Societies were dissolved in the 1930s and propaganda linked the language to Jews, but the sources show several motives and varied policy (Chapter 6).	"It was suppressed by the regime, with antisemitism one of several documented reasons."

Notice what changed

Every careful version is longer and less dramatic than the original. That is usually how checking works: a slogan becomes a statement with a scope, a date and a source. If a claim is just as short and strong after you have checked it, you may have found a true one, but check again.

A Six-Question Method

1. Who says so?

2. When was it written?

Founder, supporter, critic, historian or a repeated story? Each has a reason to say what it says.

A letter at the time and a memoir fifty years later are different kinds of evidence.

3. What is the claim exactly?

Rewrite it with a scope: where, when, how many, by whom.

4. What would show it false?

If nothing could, it is probably an opinion and not a fact.

5. Is there independent support?

A second source that did not copy the first, such as an archive, a newspaper or a historian outside the movement.

6. What does the careful version say?

State what the evidence supports, with its limits, in your own words.

A worked example

Take the story from Chapter 2: "Zamenhof's father burned his notebooks, so he rebuilt the language from memory." **1.** It is repeated in biographies, so the source is the question. **2.** It is told long after the event. **3.** The claim is specific: a father, a fire, a reason. **4.** A contemporary letter or a family account from the time would support it, and the absence of one weakens it. **5.** You would look for an independent source. **6.** The careful version is: "A frequently repeated story says so; its original source needs checking." You have not shown that it is false. You have shown how much weight it can bear.

Reading a Language Movement's History

- **Expect partisan sources.** Movements write their own histories. Read them for detail, and read outside historians for judgment (check).
- **Separate the language from the movement.** A language can work without the movement winning, and a movement can fail without its language failing.
- **Name the aim before judging.** Chapter 9: "failed" needs "at what?"
- **Be careful with numbers.** Speaker counts, congress attendance and casualties are estimates; quote the range and the source.
- **Treat persecution with care.** State the documented acts and avoid detail the record does not give (Chapter 6).

A British comparison

The same method works on stories closer to home: the "fact" that Scots is only slang, that Gaelic was banned in schools, that Scotland has a certain number of words for snow. Each can be put through the six questions: who says so, when, exactly what, what would disprove it, who confirms it independently, and what the careful version is. An Edinburgh reader who can do this for Esperanto can do it for any language story.

Check the details

The timeline dates and every figure in this course should be checked against primary documents and recent historians before you rely on them. This course describes the movement from published sources and does not recommend or discourage learning the language.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Choose a claim about a language that you have heard (not one of the six) and put it through the six-question method, ending with a careful version.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 2

Write a 200-word fair summary of Esperanto's history for a reader who knows nothing, using no claim that you could not support from this course.

→ [Solution](#)

EXERCISE 3

Pick the one claim in the table that you think is hardest to settle, explain why, and say what evidence you would still want.

Quick Reference

- **Method:** who, when, what exactly, what would disprove it, independent support, careful version
- **Careful versions:** add scope, date and source; they are usually longer
- **Aim first:** name what a movement tried to do before calling it a failure
- **Numbers:** ranges with sources, not single figures
- **Language lessons:** *Esperanto Grammar 1*

Course complete

You have followed Esperanto from a Białystok pamphlet to an online community, and practised a method for testing stories about languages. To learn the language itself, see *Esperanto Grammar 1*.