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The simple language invented to solve world problems

According to Terry and Anica Page of Milton Keynes, Esperanto is the language of love. They met at an international conference in Amsterdam in the 1960s and have been together ever since.

Slovenian-born Anica says: 'We call it 'our' language and it can be very romantic.'

Esperanto first fired the imagination of Cambridge graduate Terry, a retired science teacher, after he read about it in an encyclopaedia when he was eight.

Several years later he borrowed I B Kellerman's Grammar of Esperanto from his local library and to his astonishment, it worked. But it was some time before he met anyone who actually spoke the language.

'It was quite by chance,' he recalls. 'I mentioned it to a friend at school. His grandfather spoke it. We talked to each other over tea and eventually I became pretty fluent.'

Anica explains why Esperanto is so easy: 'Its like Lego with words. You simply add a prefix or suffix for a different meaning. There are no irregular verbs. There's one sound for each letter.'

Terry blames politics for the fact that Esperanto has never been adopted universally. 'It was put forward at the League of Nations in the 1920s. But England wanted English and France wanted French. It was the death knell for Esperanto.'

The Esperanto Association's treasurer, Joyce Bunting, lives in Harpenden and came to Esperanto late in life.

'I was 47,' she said. 'I went to a summer school which offered practical Esperanto. I was good at French and had a taste of Greek and Latin.'

'Esperanto was different. It was logical. It has a beautiful sound - the vowels are clear, like they are in Italian. I went to a beginners' class in London every week and started teaching myself. Within a matter of weeks I was corresponding with people all over the world.'

'The association is spearheading a campaign to teach language awareness in schools, using Esperanto as a bridge language. There are five pilot projects under way.'



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[Journalistname]Bev Creagh[/Journalistname]