

Language is window on the world

As the end of the year approaches an event in Llandudno in 2010 could provide an ideal new year resolution.

A language enthusiast from the Conwy town is keen to set up a local Esperanto language group.

Developed in the 1880s by Dr Ludwig Lazar Zamenhof (1859-1917) the Esperanto language is spoken by an estimated million people worldwide.

Interest in the language will be given a boost too when the British Esperanto Congress meets in Llandudno in May.

Esperanto supporters argue that the language has not gained the recognition it deserves.

Llandudno Esperanto speaker Bill Chapman was born in Leicester, but has been living in Wales for the past 27 years.

" People are only strangers because of the restrictions of language "
Bill Chapman

He thinks that although the language may not have taken the world "by storm" yet, it is "slowly but surely moving in that direction, with the internet giving it a significant boost in recent years".

"I'm actually quite optimistic about its future, even if we have to wait a while to see it fulfilled," he added.

He learnt to speak Esperanto as a 17-year-old old in 1967.

His interest in languages stems from there, and now he also speaks Welsh, French and German.

"I had an interest in knowing what was happening in the rest of the world, and Esperanto was especially useful to understand what was happening in the communist countries of Europe," he said.

English language

Despite the perception that the words "do you speak English?" will get you a response almost anywhere in the world, Mr Chapman said in his experience that was not true.

"I've been lost in the back-of-beyond in Bulgaria and the "do you speak English?" question got me nods, but then in Bulgaria a nod is a no," he said.

"It is also unfair to expect everyone to learn to speak English," he said.

Esperanto is a simple language, which is easily built upon, he added.

"I've made friends around the world through Esperanto that I would never have been able to communicate with otherwise," he said.

Useful Esperanto words

- happy - felica
- new - nova
- year - jaro Source: Esperanto dictionary

"Then there's also the Pasporta Servo, which provides free lodging and local information to Esperanto-speaking travellers in over 90 countries."

Mr Chapman said he had guided tours of Berlin and Milan and Douala in Cameroon.

He has also discussed philosophy with a Slovene poet, humour on television with a Bulgarian TV producer, what it was like in East Berlin before the wall came down, and even how to cook perfect spaghetti.

"I get to see places through the eyes of the people living there. It opens a window on the world," he added.

The Esperanto congress is visiting Llandudno for the second time, and Mr Chapman wants to use the visit to set up a local group.

It is impossible to estimate the number of Esperanto speakers available in the area, he said.

But with easy access to free on-line Esperanto courses Mr Chapman said he is confident there would be interested people.

"The congress itself will have delegates from 110 countries and will be a mix of lectures and social events," he said.

"It's a chance for me to meet old friends, and to make new friends.

"People are only strangers because of the restrictions of language, ," he added.

The 2010 British Esperanto Congress will be held in Llandudno from May 14-16.

To accompany the event a glossy leaflet, in Esperanto, has been printed featuring the attractions of Llandudno.

Story from BBC NEWS:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/uk_news/wales/north_west/8376794.stm

Published: 2009/12/30 10:00:39 GMT

© BBC MMX