

## Introduction to “Esperanto: Pasporto al la Tuta Mondo”

*Pasporto al la tuta mondo.* Is this a completely new approach to teaching the international language? Yes! You are ready to begin the adventure of learning Esperanto, but before you plunge in, take a few minutes to understand what you will be doing and why!

Right from the beginning, you are going to be immersed in the language. But be assured, you won't drown- it's not the “sink or swim” method! Everything has been designed to support your understanding, as you become familiar with how the language sounds and is used. The good news about Esperanto is that there are no irregular forms and exceptions to get in the way of your developing intuitions. Your confidence will develop quickly as you keep watching the episodes, and realize that you are understanding more of the context of what you are hearing. Just remember that the most important thing is to let it soak in without being concerned about understanding everything immediately. You will see the results once you give yourself opportunities to practice and use the language. Now let's talk about how and why this will work for you.

How do people typically start learning a new language? Often, they will ask “How do you say ‘hello’ in Esperanto (or Spanish, or Chinese)? How do you say “how are you?”, “book,” “language” and so on? This approach assumes that we learn best by memorizing small pieces of information, and that we can learn another language in terms of equivalents of our native tongue. This contrasts with how we learn our native language as children. Right from the beginning, we heard people speaking to each other, using words and structures that we didn't understand. First, we learned to grasp the general meaning. Later, we heard enough language in different contexts to understand more and more details. Eventually, we attempted to communicate using the code we were hearing around us.

Well, we are not infants anymore. Language teaching research has asked, which approach works best for adults and older children, learning a second language? One finding is an obvious one. For the average student, the traditional step-by-step methods of learning, even over a period of years, didn't lead to any significant ability to communicate with speakers of the language. On the other hand, young people and adults who were forced into a language “immersion” experience in another culture usually “acquired” the ability to communicate, just as children do. The rate at which this happens can vary considerably, depending upon the individual's openness and willingness not to be self-conscious, but virtually everyone can do it.

Subsequent research confirmed that natural language acquisition in both young people and adults usually takes place most effectively when listening comprehension is made the basis for developing all the language skills. Those most successful in communicating were the ones who learned quickly to understand the essential gist of what they were hearing. They didn't get hung up on individual words they did not recognize. They worked at understanding what people were saying directly, without attempting to make a mental translation of everything they were hearing.

A major advance in language teaching took place when military academies and some major university language departments began experimenting with video-based instruction. Studies showed a 40% increase in learning effectiveness. The principal reason for this was that video programs can provide both an authentic cultural context and a great deal of natural language, spoken by a variety of people. Students could listen over and over again, as often as they needed to in order to understand. They were no longer learning isolated words based on their equivalent meaning in the native language, then attempting to build them up into meaningful sentences. They were hearing authentic conversations and learning to understand meaning in context, just as they would have had to do if immersed in the culture.

The advantage of multi-media approaches to language acquisition is that they can make

it possible for students to have the type of immersion experience that has been shown to be most effective for the learner. In “Pasporto” you will be able to hear Esperanto spoken in a natural context, with plenty of visual and situational cues to help you understand the meaning.

Is it difficult to learn this way? It may seem so at first! Instead of being “spoon-fed” the language word by word, you will be hearing complete conversations- lots of natural language material all at once. Scary and frustrating? It doesn't have to be, but that is a natural initial reaction. It will be challenging, but be assured it will become less intimidating as you continue to work with the lessons. Just keep reminding yourself that as a language learner, you only need understand the gist of what you are hearing. Each time you listen to a lesson, more of it will make sense.

Relax, observe, listen, and figure out for yourself what is going on. Don't try to assimilate everything at once, nor decode it into English! As you immerse yourself, you will begin to develop your own language intuitions for Esperanto. This is what needs to happen, to make Esperanto a vibrant, useful language for you. Really work at hearing the sounds of the language. Have fun trying to imitate what you see and hear. Talk back to the characters! The more you speak out loud, the more you will tend to retain.

Are you now prepared to be immersed in Esperanto? You can do it. Just concentrate on listening, and leave your native language behind. Don't feel you're not learning anything if you don't “get” it all and are not fluent right away. Your comprehension should always be way ahead of what you can say, but the more you listen, the easier you will find it to both understand and speak.

So if you're ready for your adventure, “la familio Bonvolo” is ready for you!