Universal Language

Isn't it strange that there is still no language that everyone on our planet understands? Many people say that English is the international language, yet there are many places you can go where English would not be understood. Even though we have sent people to the moon, invented computers and can travel anywhere on earth in a matter of hours, we still have not come up with a universal way to communicate with each other.

There is a legend that long ago there was only one language. The people at that time, being proud and ambitious, decided to build a tower that would reach up to the heavens. God was not pleased with this, however, and mixed up their language, in the process creating many languages, so they would not understand each other. As a result, they were not able to work together, and so the tower, known as the tower of Babel, was never completed. Inspired by this story, people have dreamed of recreating a single universal language ever since.

For many centuries, Latin was the language that educated people in Europe used as a common means of communication. It was the language of science and education. However, in the 17th century, the German philosopher Leibniz dreamed about constructing a language that could replace Latin. It would be able to mathematically express every thought possible and would therefore be better than any existing natural language. Unfortunately, the project was too ambitious and never completed, and even if it had, it probably would have been too abstract and difficult for people to learn.

Throughout history, there have been times when a particular language is widely used by many different people in addition to their own native languages as an international language. Lingua franca is the term used to describe such languages. Many people think this word refers to French, which was a lingua franca in Europe in the 19th century. In fact, the term refers to a language spoken around the eastern Mediterranean Sea as a language of trade and diplomacy from late medieval times until the Renaissance. It was mostly Italian but mixed with French, Spanish, Greek and even Arabic. In modern times, English enjoys the status of a lingua franca in many parts of the world.

The most successful attempt at creating a constructed language that could be used as a lingua franca has been Esperanto. It was created by Ludwik Zamenhof, a Polish medical doctor in the 19th century. Saddened by the many quarrels and arguments between the different ethnic groups living in Poland at the time, such as Russians, Poles, Tatars, Germans and others, he dreamed of creating a language that could be easily learned by everyone and be used as a neutral tool of communication by people from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.

Esperanto is still around today, but it has failed to become a universal language. One of the reasons is that it is not taught at school except as an experiment in Hungary and China, and so never really caught on. People still study it as a hobby and meet up with other enthusiasts of Esperanto, but the numbers of those who learn it cannot compete with the popularity of English. Although Esperanto failed to attract enough speakers to become a lingua franca people have never given up on the dream and continue to create new international languages such as Interlingua, Ido and others.

Which of the following is NOT the reason why Esperanto has failed to become a universal language?

1. Esperanto is not an obligatory subject at schools.
2. Esperanto is a difficult language to learn.
3. There are not enough enthusiasts of Esperanto.
4. Its place has already been taken by English.