

8 Read and listen

a Look through the text quickly. Find out what happened:

1 in 1889 2 at the beginning of the 19th century 3 in 1977 4 in 1984

ARTIFICIAL LANGUAGES

When people are faced with a foreign-language barrier, the usual way round it is to find someone to translate for them. However, the process of translation itself is often a source of miscommunication. The mistakes that are made can often lead to great amusement – for example, a refrigerator in Asia that had a sign saying ‘This refrigerator is out of control’ rather than ‘out of order’! So it’s not surprising that many people believe that the foreign-language barrier can be overcome more easily through the use of an ‘artificial’ language (AL) – a language invented to facilitate international communication.

Although there have been many attempts to create a simple, logical and plausible AL over the centuries, very little progress has really been made towards the creation of an internationally-recognised and universally-used language. Here are three examples of ALs:

Esperanto

This was invented by the Pole, Ludwig Lazarus Zamenhof, and it is the best-known of all ALs. The first Esperanto journal was published in 1889, and the First Universal Congress of Esperanto was held in 1905, bringing together nearly 700 delegates from 20 countries. In the 1970s, it was estimated to be taught in 600 schools and 31 universities around the world. Today, estimates of the number of fluent speakers worldwide vary from less than 1 million to over 15 million. The Universal Esperanto Association has members in 121 countries, and most speakers are from Eastern Europe (especially Bulgaria, Poland, the Czech and Slovak Republics, and Hungary).

Solresol

This remarkable language was invented by a French music master, Jean François Sudre, at the beginning of the 19th century. Solresol was based on the principle that the tones of music, as named in the seven-note diatonic scale (do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti), could be used as the basic syllables of a universal language. Two-note combinations were used for grammatical words, e.g. *dore* ‘I’, or *domi* ‘you’. Common words used three-note combinations, e.g. *doredo* ‘time’ or *doremi* ‘day’. Opposites in meaning were expressed by reversing the order of syllables, e.g. *misol* ‘good’ and *solmi* ‘evil’. The unique feature of this AL is that it could be played, whistled, sung or spoken. It became quite popular in the 19th century, but it was difficult to learn and did not succeed in the end. Maybe its biggest success was in 1977, when it was used by Stephen Spielberg in his film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

Klingon

Invented by Marc Okrand for the 1984 film *Star Trek III*, this is the official language of the Klingon Empire, and it is the only known intergalactic language. There is now a Klingon dictionary of 1,500 words, an outline grammar, conversational course material for those who want to learn it, and a growing number of enthusiasts on the internet! A small number of people, mostly dedicated Star Trek fans, can have a conversation in Klingon. Its vocabulary, heavily centred on Star Trek-Klingon concepts, can sometimes make it difficult for everyday use – for instance, while there are words for ‘spacecraft’, ‘war’ or ‘bridge’ (of a ship), there is currently no word for ‘bridge’ in the sense of a crossing over water.



ALs – some live, some die. Creating one isn’t easy – but no doubt more attempts will be made in the future.

b ▶ **CD2 T29** Read the text again and listen. Answer the questions.

- How can translation be unsuccessful sometimes?
- Which two of the three ALs mentioned in the text are still used by some people today?
- How many speakers of Esperanto are there?
- Where is Esperanto most commonly spoken?
- If ‘happy’ in Solresol is *misoso*, what is the word for ‘sad’?
- Why did Solresol not succeed?
- How many people can speak to each other in Klingon?
- What problems does Klingon have as a language?