

Polish women promoting hybrid language

By Carol Azizian
staff writer

Ada Sikorska Figliera's linguistic resume looks like an amalgam of foreign languages.

Fluent in several European languages, including her native Polish, Figliera has little difficulty crossing cultural barriers when she travels.

But Figliera and her husband, Gian Carlo (an Italian), prefer to communicate in Esperanto, the 97-year-old international language spoken by some 10 million people worldwide.

"People who are open to the world (want to learn) Esperanto," she said through a translator. (English is one of the few languages she doesn't speak fluently.)

Figliera, who resides in Madrid,

Spain, gave a presentation before the Esperanto Society of Michigan at the Bloomfield Township Library last week. Her library also includes stops in Salt Lake City, Utah and San Francisco. From there, she will travel to the Universal Esperanto association's international convention in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Keeping in touch with Esperantists across the globe gives her plenty of material for the Esperanto-language newspaper which she edits.

FIGLIERA ESPOUSES the view commonly held by most Esperantists — learning the international language makes it easier to study European languages. Along with other Esperantists, she shares the Utopian hope that the language will bring people of different

nationalities closer together.

"Esperanto is a neutral language, with no imperialistic undertones," she said.

Explaining the significance of a pin bearing the Esperanto emblem, Figliera said: "La verda stelo estas simbolo de Esperanto — ĝoj plaj kvin plintoj reprezentas kvin kontinentojn kaj la verda kolora estas simbolo de la espero."

Translation: The green star is a symbol of Esperanto — its five points represent five continents and the green color is a symbol of hope.

The word Esperanto literally means "one who hopes." A Polish-Russian ophthalmologist, L.L. Zamenhof, devised Esperanto in 1887 with the hope that a common language would foster better relations between Europeans.

Drawing nearly 60 percent of the words from Latin, Zamenhof attempted to make the language as simple as possible. The alphabet has 28 letters, each with only one sound.

THERE are only a few grammatical rules. All nouns end in "o," all adjectives end in "a" and there is a single, completely regular conjugation for verbs. All spelling is phonetic. In pronunciation, the accent is always on the last syllable.

With a series of prefixes and suffixes, one root can produce as many as

40 related words. For example, domo is the root word for house. If you add the suffix -ejo (meaning larger), the word becomes domo-ejo and is translated mansion. Adding -isto (denoting) makes the word domisto, meaning porter. The prefix fi (repetition) in front of domo translates into house of ill repute.

Esperanto is so simple, says Figliera, that she was able to master the language in four months. Her teacher was a Hungarian poet who spoke only Hungarian and Esperanto.

The movement has gained more momentum overseas than it has in the

United States, according to Philip Driscoll of Chicago, a member of the Esperanto Society of Michigan.

"It's been slow in the United States, primarily because you can travel anywhere, and almost everyone speaks English," he said.

ONLY A FEW American universities, such as San Francisco State and Loyola, offer courses in Esperanto. That's much compared to the number in the People's Republic of China, where 13 universities offer Esperanto courses to nearly 120,000 students.

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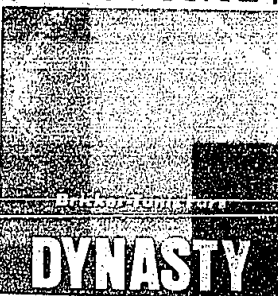
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