international auxiliary languages

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Title

International Artificial Language

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Abstract

International Auxiliary Languages (IALs) are languages consciously planned for enabling communication between speakers having different native tongues on an equal footing. They are the most developed area of interlinguistics, the science of languages that are constructed or planned on purpose. The term "auxiliary" refers to the fact that IALs are intended to be used as second languages only. In general, IALs are supported by people who are dissatisfied of the use of national languages – like English or French – in international settings, so they promote the use of a 'neutral' tool. For IAL supporters, 'neutral' means that they are not bound to any specific ethnicity. The most successful IAL ever is Esperanto, which succeeded to gather a community of practice without substantial interruption, for over a century. Today, IALs live a new Spring thanks to the internet, especially social media and Wikipedia, which give them new visibility to the general public.

Keywords
IAL, International Auxiliary language, language creation, planned language, constructed language, Esperanto

The expression 'International Artificial Language' (since now, IAL) was in vogue in the early days of the 20th century, when the debate about the language of science considered the adoption of such a language for publication of research results (Gordin 2015). In particular, Otto Jespersen, a prominent Danish linguist in his time, launched his appeal to the linguists in 1931 for the establishment of a branch of language sciences, called interlinguistics, in order to study the criteria to establish the norm of IALs, languages constructed for secondary use ('auxiliary') between people having different mother tongues ('international'). In 1931, there were already different IALs in competition, each of them claiming to be the best candidate, to be adopted not only for science but also for international diplomacy, commerce and tourism. In general, an IAL

is a contact language, that is, a non-spontaneous regularization of more natural languages at the same time, unlike pidgins (Gobbo 2017a; see also **iela0214, iela0314**).

According to the classification by Blanke (2006), based on sociolinguistic parameters (see also: **iela0362**), most of these proposals were stacked in the first stage, i.e. that of *language project*. An IAL project is merely a written sketch of a *langue* (language structure, in Ferdinand de Saussure's sense, see also **iela0351**) without *parole* (language-in-use). In the first half of the 20th century, there were literally hundreds of such IAL projects, either reform proposals of the most successful IALs or attempts to simplify Latin. Only a few successfully reached Blanke's second step of *semilanguage*. In this stage, the IAL succeeds in gathering a community of enthusiasts that use it mainly in written form, for specific purposes and restricted domains. In chronological order, these semilanguages are: Giuseppe Peano's Latino sine Flexione (1903); Louis Couturat's Ido (1907), the unwanted offspring of Esperanto; Edgard de Wahl's Occidental (1922), called Interlingue since 1949; finally, Otto Jespersen's Novial (1928), which was an attempt to reconcile the different proposals under the umbrella of a "new IAL" (nov-ial). Latino sine Flexione and Novial did not survive their proponents. In other words, after the passing of Peano and Jespersen respectively, nobody used their IALs in a substantial way.

There is only one IAL that successfully reached the third and final step of Blanke's classification, which means that it is a naturalized language: Esperanto. Unlike all the other cases just mentioned, the original proponent of Esperanto, Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof, stressed the ideal and ethical value of his IAL, as a language designed to foster peace and fraternity between all people, overcoming national barriers. For him, a specific group of Esperanto speakers should emerge thanks to the language, not based on ethnic bonds but on a common humanitarian ethics, that he first called Hillelism, then Homaranismo (Korzhenkov 2010). Until the First World War, Esperanto obtained some attention and formed a social movement of supporters, called 'esperantists', who contested aggressive nationalism in the name of pacifism and political neutrality (see also **iela0284**). Unlike the supporters of other IALs, esperantists always considered their language a tool not only for science or diplomacy but first and above all a key tool to overcome social inequality (Gobbo 2017b; see also **iela0361**). This approach proved to be the most effective in forming a stable community of practice, as esperantists did not use Esperanto only or purely for practical purposes, but also and especially for friendship and mutual collaboration.

History of the most important IALs

The hope of a quick adoption of Esperanto vanished with the First World War. In the years 1920-21, esperantists tried to lobby for Esperanto at the League of Nations, but without any success. In the same period, Esperanto got some serious attention in the circles of left-winged political activists – in particular among socialists, communists and anarchists. The result was that there were two distinct and parallel social movements promoting Esperanto: the first one was politically 'neutral', fostering the idea of Esperanto as an IAL, while the second one was politically engaged, fostering the idea of Esperanto as the key tool of the class revolution (see also **iela0251)**.

This division of the Esperanto movement gave space to the other candidates (in particular Ido, Occidental, Novial). However, even if some supporters of Esperanto passed on the side of another IAL, the movement supporting Esperanto remained by far the most solid, because of its ideal and ideological component. Quite often, supporters of other IALs accused esperantists to be a kind of sect, with its rituals and beliefs, and therefore unfit for the modern world. On the contrary, they claimed that their endeavor in favor of their IALs was based on scientific method, rationality, progress. Paradoxically, the result was that the movements around the other IALs were far weaker than the one for Esperanto. In fact, their language ideology (see also **iela0217**) did not promote language loyalty, unlike the case of Esperanto. In general, supporters of IALs were convinced that the main difficulty that prevented the adoption of their IALs by official institutions was in their structure. Therefore, when a new IAL was proposed, they usually left the previous one, in the name of progress. For instance, this is the main cause of the decline of the Ido movement after the First World War. Once published, Ido collected part of the élite of the Esperanto movement. However, the discussion on the necessary structural adaptation of Ido in order to be accepted forced its supporters to debate the language instead of using it. In 1914, a few days before the beginning of the First World War, Couturat died tragically in a car accident (Garvía 2015). Many Ido supporters lost enthusiasm, but it was only when Edgard de Wahl published Occidental (1922) that the decline of the Ido movement became irreversible.

The more nationalism increased, the less chances IALs had. Fascism in Italy and in Nazism in Germany, after an early period of mild tolerance, banned Esperanto associations. Moreover, during the Second World War esperantists were explicitly persecuted (Lins 2017). If the Esperanto movement barely survived the war, the movement supporting other IALs was completely destroyed, at least in Europe. After the war, a new IAL was proposed in the U.S. called Interlingua (1951), a Romance-like IAL, as a by-product of the International Auxiliary Language Association (IALA). This private institution conducted interlinguistic research in Europe and America for almost thirty years, raising the interests of major linguists, including Edward Sapir (see also **iela0350**). Interlingua formed a tiny community of practice, gathering together the few supporters of rivals of IALs, in particular Occidental-Interlingue.

In the meantime, the Esperanto movement was forced to rethink itself in the postwar world. Most of the left-winged esperantists died, thus the "neutral" Esperanto movement became mainstream. The most important Esperanto organization became the Universal Esperanto Association (UEA), whose headquarters are nowadays in Rotterdam (the Netherlands). In the 1950s, UEA started a strong campaign of lobbying at the UN for the adoption of Esperanto as a working language. The main result was a resolution of UNESCO in favor of Esperanto and the status of consultative organization to UEA. The language ideology was elaborated in the 1960s and 1970s, linking Esperanto to language rights and the protection of linguistic diversity, in particular minority and indigenous languages, against any form of linguistic imperialism (see also **iela0106, iela0221, iela0240**). After the death of Stalin in 1953, Esperanto started to be permitted again in the former USSR and the countries of the Warsaw Pact. Thus, during the Cold War period, Esperanto became a means to be in contact with the other side of the Iron Curtain. As a consequence, the Esperanto movement became truly worldwide, growing in countries such as China, Japan and Brazil.

The new Spring of IALs

For a long time, IALs proposed after Interlingua had little or no visibility, remaining merely language projects, an example being Arturo Alfandari's Neo (1961). It was only the advent of the World Wide Web in the 1990s, and the fall of the USSR, that the situation changed for the better. While English was becoming the de facto lingua franca (see also **iela0227**), the web gave new visibility to old and new IALs. Most notably, Esperanto gained a considerable attention thanks to the internet: by October of 2018, the Esperanto Wikipedia had reached the target of 250,000 entries, while the mobile app for language learning Duolingo achieved the impressive number of two million learners of Esperanto in only two years. However, more Esperanto speakers in the web does not necessarily imply more members of the Esperanto movement, who number approximately 10,000 worldwide.

In addition, Ido and Interlingua succeeded in revitalizing their respective movements to some extent, even if their numbers are tiny compared to Esperanto (less than 1,000 supporters each). Interlingue and Novial did not attract any remarkable interest. On the other hand, new IALs gained visibility thanks to the web. The most important are George Boree's Lingua Franca Nova (1998) and Dmitri Ivanov's Lingwa de Planeta (2010; see Libert 2013). Moreover, there is now a small revival of Auxiliary Slavic Languages, a group of IALs planned to facilitate communication in the Eastern European area (van Steenbergen 2016).

Unlike what most supporters thought in the 20th century, the main difficulty behind the acceptance of an IAL by official institutions proved to be political: the adoption of IALs was blocked for language politics, regardless of their differences (see also **iela0198**). According to J. R. R. Tolkien, the English philologist and writer, there is another major defect behind all IALs that prevented their success at a large scale: they lack a supportive myth (see also **iela0281**).

Today's supporters of IALs seem to be more interested in using their language online and offline with other supporters, without engaging in the social movement devoted to the IAL.

SEE ALSO:
iela0106
iela0198
iela0214
iela0217
iela0218
iela0221
iela0227
iela0240
iela0350
iela0361
iela0362
iela0281
iela0284
iela0314

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