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# The language ideology of Esperanto

## From the world language problem to balanced multilingualism

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The status of Esperanto, the language launched by Zamenhof in 1887, has been contested since its beginning. Esperanto became the most relevant of the International Auxiliary Languages (IALs) from a sociolinguistic perspective, as it successfully survived two World Wars in spite of being explicitly persecuted by Hitler and Stalin, among others (Lins 2017). The motivations of the pioneers of Esperanto were put under scrutiny according to the different political context, both across time and place (Forster 1982). Therefore, its language ideology was adapted in order to reduce the level of contestedness of the language, and this adaptation re-framed the self-perception of its speakers and their attitudes toward Esperanto itself. For instance, before the Great War in Europe there was a strong connection between the Esperanto movement and pacifism (Alcalde 2015), while in the 1930s in China and Japan Esperanto was linked to anarchism and communism (Lins 2008). In the aftermath of the Second World War, the language ideology deeply changed (Jordan 1987), and the link between Esperanto and linguistic rights became increasingly stronger (Pietiläinen 2010). Nowadays, the new generation of Esperantists is facing the new challenges of the Digital Era. In particular, there is an ideological convergence with other contested languages, in particular Regional and Minority Languages, also in the Esperanto speaker's attitudes (Caligaris 2016; Gobbo and Miola 2016). This chapter aims to illustrate the evolution of the language ideology of Esperanto, in comparison with other contested languages.

### 1. Introduction

Esperanto is the most relevant International Auxiliary Language (IAL) in history. A stable community of practice formed around the idea of it as a “neutral language”, unlike other rival IALs that failed to prevail, starting from the challenge of Ido (for a recent account, see Garvía 2015; a classic study, still relevant, is Large 1985). For

the moment, I define Esperanto as a “neutral language” in the sense used in inter-linguistics, i.e. Esperanto, like all classic IALs (from Volapük to IALA’s Interlingua: for details, see Gobbo 2009, 2020) does not belong to a specific ethnic group or nation, and therefore it is neutral. Later, when referring to this sense of the word in contrast with other interpretations I will use the expression “ethnically neutral”. This ethnic neutrality has important consequences from a sociolinguistic point of view. In particular, the collective of Esperanto speakers is hard to define in usual terms, so that approximations are often used, at least since Melnikov (1992), who uses the term “pseudo-ethnic group” (*kvazaŭetno*, in Esperanto). I propose here a different perspective: instead of taking for granted that the collective of Esperanto speakers is a “speech community” (as done, for instance, by Fettes 1996), it is better to refer to them as a “community of practice”. Eckert (2006) adopts this term from sociology, meaning a social grouping in virtue of a shared practice that not only builds a shared experience among the group members but also shares a commitment to understand the experience itself. In this case, the shared practice and the commitment is the use of the Esperanto language, in any form. In other words, what binds Esperanto speakers together is the language used (the object level of the experience) and the reflection over the language itself, namely why it is worth using the language (the meta-level).

In this chapter, I mainly investigate the meta-level, which deals with how Esperanto speakers represent the language in time and which eventually constitutes the Esperanto language ideology. In fact, language ideology is formed by two factors: the language representation (the emic approach, i.e. Esperantists’ perspective)<sup>1</sup> and the collocation of that language representation in the larger society (i.e., how it is perceived externally). As we will see below in detail, both factors are necessary to understand language ideology. Far from being independent from the external world, we might even say that language representation is shaped within the boundaries that the external world puts on the community of practice in order to co-exist with it.

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1. I use the expression ‘Esperanto speaker’ referring to the dimension of language proficiency. An “Esperantophone” is an individual with some level of proficiency in the language obtained by using it with other speakers. An ideological commitment to the language, i.e. some kind of “Esperantism”, is usual but in some cases the Esperanto speaker refuses to be considered an Esperantist. The term “Esperantist” – which has a long tradition in the community – on the other hand refers to somebody supporting Esperanto even without actually using the language. According to my observation as a participant in the last twenty years, there are Esperantophones who do not like to be defined as Esperantists, while on the other hand there exist people who define themselves Esperantists without any actual knowledge of the language. Both subgroups are considerably small in percentage in relation to the total members of the Esperanto community of practice. In other words, the majority of Esperantists are Esperantophones and vice versa.

Unlike speech communities, in the case of communities of practice the sociological profile of the speakers (e.g., class, gender, ethnic group, workplace, birthplace) is not predominant in the definition of the relations among group members. This distinctive feature is usually perceived as a distinctive trait of the community itself, being one of the traits that not only attracts people to join the Esperanto community but also convinces them to stay because it is worthwhile to do so. The other trait that fosters belonging to the community is the possibility of contributing to Esperanto culture. A clarification is needed here. For “culture” I follow the non-essentialist view of several anthropologists (for instance, Street 1993), whereby the active process of shared sense-making within a community produces virtual and real artefacts that last over time. For “virtual artefacts” I mean both artefacts living in a virtual space – like the internet – and social conventions, which are part of Esperanto pragmatics. An example of the first case is the Facebook group launched in Esperanto on the topic of Esperanto literature called *Literatura Babilejo* (‘place for chatting on literature’). An example of the latter can be found in a pragmatic social convention of being introduced to strangers. In Esperanto, it is not polite to ask “where are you from?” as one of the first questions when meeting another Esperanto speaker for the first time, while “when/how did you start learning Esperanto?” is perfectly acceptable. If we compare, for example, two non-native speakers of English in the same situation, politeness works the other way around: the first question is perfectly acceptable, while asking a stranger when he or she started learning English would sound odd, to say the least.

Ethnic neutrality as illustrated above is the common ground upon which Esperanto speakers have built their language representation over the years. The concept of neutrality is far from being stable, and in many cases it is re-framed according to the external context. In particular, the word “neutrality” can assume a greater or lesser political colour, as attested by a PhD dissertation written in German, entitled “the neutral language” (Sikosek 2006; see also Gobbo 2017). As Schor (2016) recently pointed out, several Esperantists she met in the last seven years are still convinced, even today, of the political neutrality of Esperanto, even if the sole fact of supporting the idea of a universal language – whatever this means – is already a political statement per se. In fact, the very existence of Esperanto is supported by people who express some sort of dissatisfaction with the power relations that exist between languages (and the groups that support them), at least at an international level, with an implicit or often explicit desire for radical change. Which direction should Esperantists take for the realisation of this radical change depends on the language ideology adopted. This is the topic that will be illustrated in the next sections.

## 2. Is Esperanto a contested language?

Nic Craith (2006: 108) introduces the expression “contested languages” as a consequence of the quest for recognition into the exclusive club of national languages: they are “forms of communication whose linguistic status is or has been disputed in the recent past [frequently being] an unfortunate consequence of the establishment of national boundaries”. Quite often, they are called “dialects”, *patois* or similar expressions, especially in public discourse, in order to suggest that they are not “real” or “true” languages (see also Tamburelli and Tosco, and Tamburelli this volume). Consequently, it is perfectly acceptable to exclude them from formal domains, most notably formal education and writing. Among the original examples given by Nic Craith are Alsatian, Franco-Provençal, Friulan, Ulster Scots. According to the definition of “contested languages” and the context from which they emerged, Esperanto is clearly not a member of this unfortunate club. However, there are some similarities between contested languages and Esperanto that are worth noting.

Like all other IALs, Esperanto is quite often accused of not being a fully-fledged language because of its artificiality. In fact, the *lingvo internacia* (‘international language’) originated like Athena from Zeus’ head, already in written form as a book in 1887. Its author, Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof, an Ashkenazi Jew living in Tsarist Russia, defined his language project through a prescriptive grammar, some sample texts and a basic dictionary (less than one thousand radicals). In other words, the language was ready for use, thanks to its written norms, before actually being spoken. Unlike several other IALs, Esperanto evolved from its project phase quite quickly and established a community of practice after Zamenhof’s struggles (for a recent account of the early history of Esperanto, see Garvía 2015). Esperanto’s main ideological concern in its relations with the rest of the world has always been defending its status as a living language capable of expressing all the nuances of life, as well as justifying the purpose of the language itself. Quite often Esperanto is considered a pseudo-language. One of the typical attacks against Esperanto is its supposed rigidity and lack of expressiveness, especially for literary purposes. This is simply false, as there is a rich original literature (for an overview see Sutton 2008). For example, one Esperanto poet, William Auld, who also wrote a small book in Esperanto about Scots, was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature by the Esperanto Centre PEN Club International.

The status of Esperanto is highly dependent on the context in which it is spoken, both in time and space. For example, the ideological discourse regarding Esperanto is different in France, the United States, or China. For instance, Lins (2008) shows that in China Esperanto has strong links with anarchism, and it was associated with the liberation of China against the Japanese invasion in the 1930s. China is an exception, however, as there is currently state support for Esperanto. In general,

the visibility of Esperanto in public relies on the efforts of activists, as in the case of many contested languages in the Old World (see also Coluzzi, Brasca and Scuri, this volume).

Another important variable that distinguishes Esperanto from the prototypical contested languages exemplified above is the dimension of territoriality. As Mark Fettes, a recent president of the Universal Esperanto Association (UEA), once said, Esperanto has no territory but it has a geography. In other words, there are places that are more important for Esperanto than others, either for historical reasons or due to the presence of related activities in modern times. For example, Białystok, the small city where Zamenhof was born, has been important mainly in the past – now there is the Ludwik Zamenhof Centre, with a permanent exhibition on his life and other cultural activities. Another example is Rotterdam, which is sometimes called by Esperantists the “Esperanto Rome”, because UEA, the leading institution supporting Esperanto since the end of the Second World War, has its headquarters there. However, it is important to emphasise that there is no physical place where Esperanto speakers live permanently in a society speaking mainly Esperanto for their everyday needs, such as to get petrol from a pump attendant, to do their shopping, or to go to see the doctor. The life of Esperanto does not rely on a society living in a definite space but only on local clubs, national gatherings, international congresses, and the internet – a possible exception being *Bona Espero* (‘Good Hope’), a community in Brazil devoted to orphans and poor children, which uses both Brazilian Portuguese and Esperanto for bilingual education (Dobrzyński 2008). Usually Esperanto meetings last only one week and only during holiday periods such as the middle of August or New Year’s Eve. Thus, Esperanto is neither a territorial language (e.g. Sardinian) nor a non-territorial language in the usual sense (e.g. Romani), as the Esperanto community of practice does not form a speech community in the strict sense.

Within the classic framework by Fishman (1991) on reversing language shift, intergenerational transmission is the most important factor that guarantees the survival of a language in danger: unless three consecutive generations speak the language at the same time, it is highly probable that the language will soon die. This assumption guides many analyses of the vitality of languages. For example, the E-GIDS – a tool to measure the status of the world languages in *Ethnologue* derived from Fishman’s work (Simons and Fennig 2017) – considers intergenerational transmission the main parameter of analysis. In the case of Esperanto, this choice leads to somewhat strange results. Moreover, another important parameter is the territoriality principle: because of that the E-GIDS makes Esperanto a “language of Poland”, because Zamenhof, the original author of Esperanto, was born in Białystok. It is worth mentioning that while nowadays Białystok is in Poland, in Zamenhof’s time it was part of Tsarist Russia, and Zamenhof never defined himself

as “Polish”, but as “a Russian citizen” (*rusujano*, according to his original wording in Esperanto). In any case, the “population” of Esperanto is indicated as “scattered internationally”, which is true. However, the most striking point of E-GIDS is the importance given to family speakers, which are estimated by specialists to be approximately 1,000 in the world, while the total number of Esperanto speakers ranges from pessimistic evaluations of 10,000 to more optimistic ones of up to one or even two million. Gobbo (2015a) proposed a diagram which depicts the typology of speakers according to their use: apart from family speakers, the most important group of Esperanto speakers consists of language activists (which counts approximately 10,000 people), while simple language users and people having some contact with the language – such as people studying the grammar without any involvement in Esperanto life – are many more. Of course, there is no guarantee that these potential Esperantists will enter the community of practice after having completed an online language class, and therefore they are placed in the outer circle of the one million estimate. It is worth noting that, even if family speakers are placed in the very centre of the diagram, the main effort of Esperanto societies is directed at increasing the number of language activists. In other words, unlike regional and minority languages, intergenerational transmission is not guaranteed by families – as Joshua Fishman pointed out – but by language activists on a voluntary basis. It should also be mentioned that some Esperantists argue that the mere existence of “native” speakers is a threat to the neutrality of the language, because it is the beginning of “real” ethnicisation (for a discussion, see Fiedler 2012 and Lindstedt 2016).

The role played by family speakers is another peculiar sociolinguistic variable in the Esperanto case. Sometimes their existence is ignored, sometimes it is excessively emphasised. An example of the latter is found in *Ethnologue* 2016, where it was argued, following Fishman’s approach, that the survival of Esperanto relies mainly on the thousand families speaking the language, and therefore the language is classified as “moribund” (E-GIDS scale = 9) because of the low number of family speakers. This evaluation seemed to be at least unfair, and it was changed to level 3 “language of wider communication” after a discussion held on the *Ethnologue* web site (Editorial Action June 2, 2016). Besides this episode, it is clear that Esperanto vitality cannot rely on family speakers alone. In reality, the role played by Esperanto families is not very important: they do not determine the normative or prestige Esperanto register, nor do they have a special authority on the language. And, above all, the community does not rely on them for intergenerational transmission (this fact has interesting parallels with the Deaf community, which cannot be investigated here for reasons of space). This difficulty in classifying Esperanto derives from the peculiar sociolinguistic profile of the language, whose history is unique among the living languages of the world. In any case, Esperanto is far from



being moribund: the truth is that intergenerational transmission is guaranteed not by families but by the language activists, who constitute the large majority of the members of the Esperanto community of practice.

From a structural point of view, Esperanto is a contact language (Lindstedt 2009), showing traits of the Slavic, Germanic and Romance languages present in Zamenhof's repertoire – and, in addition, of the classic languages he studied: Ancient Greek, Latin and Biblical Hebrew. This is not the place to delve into this topic: what is important to stress here is the fact that Esperanto shows a considerable degree of distance with all the languages of the Old World (and not only). In other words, Esperanto is an *Abstand* language, i.e. a language defined by distance (see also Tamburelli and Tosco, this volume), of all languages present in Europe. This fact has an important consequence: there is no risk of confusion or assimilation to other languages, as in the case of many Contested Languages of Italy, such as Piedmontese, Lombard or Venetan, that are often considered dialects of Italian in public and academic discourse, even if in reality they are Romance languages of their own (see Miola 2017 and Cravens 2014. Also Coluzzi, Brasca and Scuri, this volume).

### 3. The tradition of Esperanto: One language, several ideologies

The year 2017 had a symbolic value for Esperanto: UNESCO celebrated the centennial of the death of Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof, the founder of the language. In fact, Zamenhof was proclaimed one of the “great personalities” of humankind as early as 1959, on the centennial of his birth (Korzhenkov 2010). In accounting for its celebration of Zamenhof, UNESCO argues that Homaranism “is the idea of the union of all the nations communicating in a common language”. However, this is Zamenhof's idea of Esperantism, i.e. his *language* ideology, not Homaranism, which is Zamenhof's religious and political project, arising from Hillelism, a reform of Judaism “dislodging the concept of a covenanting God” (Schor 2016: 79). On his view, Homaranism was something different from Esperantism: inside the Esperanto community, Zamenhof dreamt of a distinct group of Esperanto speakers forming a speech community in the strict sense, with Esperanto as the main language. They might have lived together in a city of a neutral state, such as Switzerland, with neutral calendar, school, habits, and even “temples” for a positivistic cult. In this way, Zamenhof argued, the nucleus of a *neŭtrala popolo* (‘neutral people’, a Zamenhofian expression) would be formed, and the avant-garde of humanity reunited as a single family (Zamenhof 1929). The Homaranism project never materialised in practice, as Zamenhof's religious and political project was fiercely attacked and rejected



by the majority of Esperantists as well, especially Catholics. The only trace that remained in the Esperanto culture is the so-called *interna ideo* ('internal idea'), whereby the use of the language per se makes Esperanto not only a tool for communication but also and above all, an instrument for improving human welfare and brotherhood, international friendship and peace. The internal idea would eventually erase animosity and war worldwide, as humans would understand each other better through the use of an ethnically neutral language (Jordan 1987: 107).

While this internal idea gives a common ground for its language representation, avoiding the adoption of Esperanto by explicit chauvinistic or xenophobic groups, on the other hand it leaves a lot of room for further ideological elaboration. Through its 130 years of life, Esperanto's language ideology was developed in so many ways that we can hardly talk properly of "Esperantism"; it would be more appropriate to talk about "Esperantisms" in the plural. Mainstream Esperantism started to be defined in the early days of the 20th century. In the year 1900, for the first time there were more Esperantists in France than in Tsarist Russia, Zamenhof's homeland, according to the statistics of activists enrolled in the Esperanto societies (as reported by Garvía 2015). The need of an IAL for practical purposes, such as tourism, commerce and diplomatic relations between the states, started to gain popularity among intellectuals and scholars, and it was popularised then through the press, especially in France (Large 1985). Moreover, in a moment where scientific research was produced not only in English, French and German but also in Japanese and Russian, an IAL was also considered as a serious option to solve the "scientific Babel", i.e. to have only one language for the writing of original, new scientific results (Gordin 2015). This idea of instrumental neutralism is well represented in the first ideological document, the Declaration of Esperantism, proclaimed during the first World Esperanto Congress, the moment in which the Esperanto Movement presented itself to the Old World (my translation from Esperanto, my emphasis):

1. Esperantism is the endeavour to spread worldwide *the use of this neutral, human language*, which, "not intruding upon the personal life of people and in no way aiming to replace existing national languages", would give to people of different nations the ability to understand each other [...] All other ideals or hopes tied with Esperantism by any Esperantist are his or her purely private affair, for which Esperantism is not responsible [...]
4. Esperanto has no lawgiving authority and is dependent on no particular person. All opinions and works of the creator of Esperanto have, similar to the opinions and work of every other Esperantist, an absolutely private quality. [...]

5. An Esperantist is a person who knows and uses the Esperanto language with complete exactness, for whatever aim he uses it [...]²

The French leaders of the Esperanto Movement believed positivistically in an ethnically neutral language such as Esperanto as a tool for the improvement of human life, without taking into account the ethical message proposed originally by Zamenhof, nor the *interna ideo* generally accepted by Esperantists. However, the founder of the UEA, the Genevan Hector Hodler, wanted to develop the internal idea in a more political fashion. As Sikosek (2006) pointed out, it would be wrong to compare the political neutrality of UEA with the political neutrality of nation-states, which are, by their monopoly of power, in a fundamentally different position. In fact, the role envisioned by Hodler was on the level of relations between individuals, not states. It is not by chance that UEA was headquartered in Geneva, in neutral Switzerland, where the Red Cross was born as well. Unlike the leaders of the Esperanto Movement in France, Hodler had no faith in the acceptance of Esperanto by nation-state political leaders. On the contrary, he nurtured the network of *konsuloj* ‘consuls’ already established in 1906 during the second World Esperanto Congress in Geneva. These “consuls” became *delegitoj* ‘delegates’, acting as local contacts for individual Esperantists joining UEA on a personal basis, regardless of their passports. Hodler’s scepticism about governments caused him to move away from the term “consul” which echoed the world of inter-state diplomacy.<sup>3</sup> This dualism between the originally French idea of Esperanto societies based on nation-states (called *naciaj societoj* in Esperanto at that time) and the French-speaking Swiss Esperanto movement’s network of free individuals created considerable friction in the relations between UEA and the national societies, friction that would eventually be solved in 1933 in Cologne, Germany, during one of the most troublesome World Esperanto Congresses ever (Sikosek 2005). There, the national societies (since then called *landaj asocioj*, avoiding an explicit reference to the concept of nation, unlike the previous name) accepted that UEA would

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2. The original Esperanto text follows: “1. La Esperantismo estas penado disvastiĝi en la tuta mondo la uzadon de lingvo neŭtrale homa, kiu “ne enrudante sin en la internan vivon de la popoloj kaj neniom celante elpuŝi la ekzistantajn lingvojn naciajn”, donus al la homoj de malsamaj nacioj la eblon kompreniĝadi inter si [...] Ĉiu alia ideo aŭ espero, kiun tiu aŭ alia Esperantisto ligas kun la Esperantismo, estos lia afero pure privata, por kiu la Esperantismo ne respondas. 4. Esperanto havas neniun personan leĝdonanton kaj dependas de neniun aparta homo. Ĉiuj opinioj kaj verkoj de la kreinto de Esperanto havas, simile al la opinioj kaj verkoj de ĉiu alia Esperantisto, karakteron absolute privatan [...] 5. Esperantisto estas nomata ĉiu persono, kiu scias kaj uzas la lingvon Esperanto tute egale por kiaj celoj li ĝin uzas.”

3. I am grateful to Humphrey Tonkin for this remark.

be the umbrella association that should lead the representation of the Esperanto movement to the external world. Unfortunately, that system did not last very long. In 1936, the headquarters of UEA were moved to London, officially because of the high costs of the office in Geneva. In reality, there was a desire to change the political equilibrium between UEA and the national associations, which eventually led to a schism in the mainstream Esperanto movement. For ten years, there were two associations in competition for leadership of the Esperanto Movement: on one hand, there was the so-called “Genevan UEA”, which took up Hodler’s view of Esperantists as a network of individuals, while, on the other hand, there was the International Esperanto League (IEL), which interpreted its role as the umbrella of national societies (for more details on the history of UEA, see van Dijk 2012). Only after the tragedies of the Second World War, where Esperantists were openly persecuted (Lins 2017), the two associations merged together: the basic structure was that of IEL, while the name of UEA was used to promote the idea of continuity with the past.

The idea of neutrality between the two World Wars again changed its political colour. The mainstream Esperanto Movement between the two World Wars defined itself as “neutral” in order to distinguish itself from the politically and socially engaged Esperanto Movement that emerged after the foundation of the USSR and the rise of socialism in Europe. In the rhetoric of that time, Esperanto was considered the “international language of the proletarians”. According to that view, proletarians should speak Esperanto, avoiding and eventually destroying national languages as instruments of oppression by the bourgeoisie and nation-states (Masson 1996). The left-wing Esperanto Movement was clearly compact in fighting against the neutralism of the mainstream Esperanto Movement, but on the other hand it was not united internally. In fact, there were different realities corresponding to the main ideologies linked with Esperanto: communism, socialism and anarchism. A separate problem was the relationship with the USSR, which at first supported but then openly and explicitly persecuted Esperantists during Stalin’s period (Lins 2017).

It is true that the limits of the mainstream Esperanto Movement’s political neutrality were severely tested in the 1930s. In Italy, for example, Esperantists tried an improbable alliance with Mussolini and Fascism, lasting only a few years (Minnaja 2007). In Germany, attempts were also made to become allies of the Nazis, with tragic results (Lins 2017). In fact, already in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler expressed his hostility to Esperanto, a language created by a Jew: “If the GEA [German Esperanto Association] thought to save Esperanto in Germany by embracing the Nazi Party, it was too late; it had always been too late” (Schor 2016: 180).

The history of the Esperanto Movement in 1930s Germany shows that point 5 of the Declaration of Esperantism of 1905 (quoted above) is problematic: the

Genevan UEA in the 1930s refused to protest against the Nazification of Esperanto in Germany because it violated the principle of the association's political neutrality. Yet, can we call a Nazi who uses Esperanto to find Esperanto speakers and kill them an Esperantist because of his active use of the language, as stated in point 5 of the Declaration of Esperantism? Nazism always considered Esperantism its nemesis, and the persecutions changed Esperanto's concept of neutrality forever.

Finally, it is worth noting that other relevant non-neutral Esperanto Movements exist, beside that of the left. One of the first ideologically non-neutral Esperanto Movements to emerge was that of the Catholics, founded in December 1902. For Catholic Esperantists, the role played by Esperanto in the long run was to become the new Latin of the Church, finally reuniting Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox. As the Archbishop of Prague, Cardinal Miloslav Vlk, himself an Esperanto speaker, stated during the homily of a mass celebrated in Esperanto: "When I am with the Esperantists I always feel not only the advantages of the language, but that it brings about more than mutual understanding: it brings community, unity, communication. And at the level of the Gospel, at the level of the Church, this means one very important thing, because it is not only community but also the presence of Christ among mankind" (Matthias 2002).

Another relevant connection is between Esperanto and vegetarianism. The first World Vegetarian Congress was organised in 1908 in Dresden, Germany, by Esperanto speakers, who founded the first international association devoted to vegetarianism. Its name was *Internacia Unuiĝo de Esperantistaj Vegetaranoj* (IUEV), International Union of Esperantist Vegetarians. In the second congress, held in Manchester in 1909, it was recognised that "the Esperanto Society worked like the Vegetarian Society, for humanitarian ends; it is desired to bring the peoples of the Earth into closer union, and therefore the two should shake hands and join in their efforts." After that, Esperanto was recognised as one of the languages in which papers might be submitted for communications during international congresses. However, the presence and relevance of Esperanto as a working language in World Vegetarian Congresses varies according to the years. In any case, it was never predominant after the first meeting in Dresden.

#### 4. Multilingualism and Esperanto: A complex relation

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Esperanto Movement had to reconstruct itself. The architect of the new UEA was Ivo Lapenna, an Italian-speaking Dalmatian Yugoslav, who learnt Esperanto at the age of nineteen. During the Second World War, Lapenna fought against the Ustashe, the Croatian Fascists who ruled a puppet state of Nazi Germany. In taking the leadership of the Esperanto Movement,

Lapenna was motivated by antifascism, as well as by anticommunism: his idea of political neutrality was linked to the newly created United Nations. Lapenna saw Esperanto as the only possible solution to *the* “world language problem”. For him this meant that there was still no ethnically neutral language for diplomatic relations among countries affiliated with the United Nations. He considered unrealistic the acceptance of a single national language such as English for international communication by the other nation-states (Lapenna *et al.* 1974). Using his diplomatic skills, he tried to get Esperanto accepted as a working language within the United Nations, but in the end his best result was acquiring for UEA “Consultative Relations Category B” with UNESCO following the acceptance by the UNESCO General Conference in Montevideo of Resolution IV.4.422–4224 (1954) in favour of UEA’s work for Esperanto, which, according to the resolution, “correspond[s] with the aims and ideals of UNESCO”. Ironically, in the resolution Esperanto was not recognised for its linguistic features (for instance, its high degree of transparency between pronunciation and writing system, or low degree of suppletivity thanks to morphological regularity), but for its ideal, represented by Zamenhof’s “internal idea”. My hypothesis is that eventually this motivation dashed Lapenna’s hopes to make Esperanto the main language for inter-state diplomacy.

Certainly Lapenna did not have a positive attitude towards multilingualism: for him, the lack of a shared language across the countries was *the* world’s language problem, in Esperanto *la monda lingvo-problemo*. In Lapenna’s view, there was space for one language problem only and therefore one solution: Esperanto. However, a new generation of Esperanto speakers emerged with a very different point of view. In 1956, a major change occurred in the structure of the Esperanto Movement: since then, a distinct association, a *junulara movado* “youth movement”, was accepted as part of UEA, only four years after its foundation.<sup>4</sup> Its name was TEJO (*Tutmonda Esperantista Junulara Organizo*, World Esperanto Youth Organisation). Most ideological novelties of the Esperanto Movement would emerge from TEJO, while UEA in many cases would act as the bastion of conservatism. A new style also emerged: instead of statements by single UEA leaders, documents with new ideas about Esperanto’s language representation were signed collectively. One of the most important appeared in 1969, when the young Esperantists met in Tyresö, Sweden. There, the following Declaration was written (my translation from Esperanto of this fundamental passage):

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4. An ancestor of TEJO, called TJO, was already founded in 1938, but the Second World War prevented it to be very active.

If we consistently apply the concept of conserving the integrity of the individual, we will condemn linguistic and cultural discrimination in any form, any so-called solution of the language problem based on discrimination. We find that until now we have not paid enough attention to the destruction of the cultural and linguistic background of many peoples. This destruction is nothing else than a tool of linguistic imperialism.<sup>5</sup>

Lapenna's view is explicitly accused of being discriminatory and therefore untenable for the new generation of Esperantists. In the same direction, the magazine *Etnismo* ('Ethnicism'), founded in 1972, and the 'international committee for ethnic freedoms' (in Esperanto: *Internacia Komitato por Etnaj Liberecoj*, IKEL), founded six years later, took those ideas a step further, to include not only international relations but also intra-national relations and especially regional and minority languages. From the first issue of the magazine (my translation from Esperanto):

The struggle against linguistic discrimination can in no way limit itself to state languages, rather it should consider at the same time, if it is sincere, the unfortunate languages of ethnic minorities within the states. (*Etnismo*, 1, May 1972)<sup>6</sup>

It should be emphasised that this "ethnicist" line within the Esperanto Movement was considered non-neutral and never became mainstream. In particular, Esperantists of the "Soviet school" did not take part in the struggle against linguistic imperialism, emphasising that 'international', 'interethnic' and 'global' language and Esperanto can co-exist in harmony (Pietiläinen 2010). However, in the long run the idea that multilingualism is not a curse but on the contrary a source of richness per se enlarged the average Esperantist's world view, according to the fieldwork study by Caligaris (2016). The point now became to find Esperanto's place on a multilingual worldwide language market. Caligaris's survey shows that the awareness of minority language rights and respect for language diversity are now part of the cultural baggage of both young adult and older participants in Esperanto meetings.

The expression "linguistic imperialism" in the Declaration of Tyresö eventually indicted the role of English as a global language, many years before the expression entered the academic discourse through the influential book by Phillipson

5. The original Esperanto text follows: "Se oni konsekvençe aplikas la koncepton pri konservo de la integreco de la individuo, oni nepre venas al malaprobo de lingva kaj kultura diskriminacioj en ĉiu formo, al malaprobo de ĉiu tiel nomata solvo de la lingva problemo, kiu baziĝas sur diskriminacio, kaj al konstato, ke oni ne sufiĉe atentis la detruadon de la kultura kaj lingva fono de multaj popoloj. Tiu detruado estas nenio alia ol instrumento de lingva imperiismo."

6. Original Esperanto text: "Luktado kontraŭ lingva diskriminacio neniel povas limiĝi al ŝtataj lingvoj, sed ĝi devas, kondiĉe ke ĝi estas sincera, konsideri samtempe la ŝtatinterne malfavoratajn lingvojn de etnaj minoritatoj."

(1992) with that title. The approach of the Tyresö generation is conflictual, pitting Esperanto against English, the latter being the problem of today's world, the former being the solution for the future. This approach proved to be quite unsuccessful in the long term, especially when dealing with the outside world: the more years passed, the more English was perceived as a catch-all winner of all international domains of use – with some authors emphasising the positive effect, while others the risks (see at least Gobbo 2015a). In such a scenario, it became increasingly difficult to determine a relevant role for Esperanto.

The generation after Tyresö believed that a new change of perspective was needed. Again, young Esperantists produced a collective document at a congress in Rauma, Finland, in 1980. This document was explicitly called the *Raŭma Manifesto*. The text criticises explicitly not only Tyresö's and Lapenna's generations but that of the pioneers (my translation from Esperanto):

The signers find a contradiction in the attitude of Esperantists, almost a conflict between our Superego and Ego: our Superego makes us preach some myths over others – L2 for all / English is our enemy / UN should adopt Esperanto / etc. – and praise the [Esperanto] language too much, even in an unfair way, in interviews; at the same time, among ourselves, we enjoy and apply Esperanto for what it really is, without any regard for the slogans of the early years.<sup>7</sup>

Using notions inspired by Freud, the original *raŭmistoj* 'Raumists' – as they were called after the publication of the Manifesto – moved the conflict from the external world (as the Esperanto Movement had always done until then) to the inner world of Esperantists themselves. Then, they go on, advancing their proposal (emphasis in the original):

We believe that [...] the downfall of English is neither a task nor a concern of Esperantists: in the end English is only an *auxiliary* language, analogously to French in its time [...]: Zamenhof never proposed that the Movement fight against French, because he had another, more valuable, alternative role for Esperanto in mind. [...] Esperantisticity is almost the same as belonging to a self-elected, diasporic, linguistic minority.<sup>8</sup>

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7. Original Esperanto text follows: "La subskribintoj konstatis kontraŭdiron en la sinteno de la esperantistaro, kvazaŭ konflikton inter idea superego kaj egoo: nia superego igas nin prediki al la aliaj homoj pri kelkaj mitoj – la dua lingvo por ĉiu; la angla lingvo estas nia malamiko; UN devas adopti Esperanton; ktp – kaj laŭdegi la lingvon eĉ neobjektive okaze de intervjuo; samtempe, inter ni, ni ĝuas kaj aplikas Esperanton laŭ tio kio ĝi efektive estas, sendepende de la praelaj sloganoj."

8. Original Esperanto text follows: "Ni kredas ke [...] la faligo de la angla lingvo estas nek tasko nek zorgo de la esperantistoj: finfine la angla rolas nur kiel *helplingvo*, analoge al la franca siatempe [...] Zamenhof neniam proponis al la E-movado kiel celon kontraŭstari la francan, ĉar



Two comments are needed here. First, the original *raŭmistoj* ‘Raumists’ got back to the roots, arguing that Zamenhof’s ideals for Esperanto were different from other pioneers, as he never challenged French’s number one position. That choice is quite obvious if we consider that the centre of the Esperanto Movement at the time was France: it would be self-defeating to make French its enemy. Moreover, some of Zamenhof’s ideals illustrated above were very radical and unacceptable to the Esperanto Movement of his time. The first Raumists, i.e., the ones who wrote the Manifesto and signed it at first, suggested taking up and realising Zamenhof’s original project, without any success. Second, the identification of the Esperanto community of practice with linguistic minorities goes counter to the idea introduced by the Tyresö generation of Esperanto as a valuable help for language minorities: if Esperanto is put on the same level as linguistic minorities, there is no special role left for it in this sense. Here, a short digression is necessary. A regional or minority language exists as such only in the presence of a majority language: in other words, there is no minority language without a majority language. Usually the majority is perceived as the antagonist, and quite often it is also the official language in the given territory where the minority language is also spoken. This is clearly not the case with Esperanto, as there is neither a relation with a definite territory (it is not a “language of Poland”, despite what *Ethnologue* 2016 states!) nor is there a clear majority language to oppose it. In reality, Esperanto is quite often simply ignored in the linguistic panorama in any context. What Esperanto speakers realised is neither Zamenhof’s idea of a “neutral people” somehow echoed in the Manifesto (no temples, no common everyday life together exists), nor a linguistic minority in the usual sense (as there is no majority language threatening Esperanto).

The Manifesto of Rauma is the document that ignited most of the debates inside the Esperanto community of practice until the publication of the Prague Manifesto in 1996 (see below). It had indeed the merit of opening the issue of the meaning of *Esperanto-kulturo*, Esperanto culture. Nowadays, the discourse around Esperanto in its internal and external communications not only relies on the language per se but also on the culture produced in the language: original and translated prose, narrative and theatre, as well as popular music of various genres – such as pop, rock, rap, reggae, mainly made by garage bands. All these cultural artefacts have been produced in the language by its speakers for its speakers since the early days of Esperanto life, but only after the Manifesto of Rauma were they consistently used in external communications too, proving that Esperanto is not only a “neutral language” but also a vehicle for a sense of belonging.

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por Esperanto li antaŭvidis pli valoran alternativan rolon. Esperantisteco estas kvazaŭ la aparteno al mem elektita diaspora lingva minoritato.”

During the last twenty years, the meaning of the word *raŭmisto* has been popularised in a way perhaps unexpected by the original authors of the Manifesto: it now indicates an Esperantist who cares much more about the life of the community than of the struggles of the Esperanto Movement to be recognised by the external world. The problem underlying the Manifesto is that many Esperantists reacted by explicitly distancing themselves from it, reaffirming that they were more involved in the diffusion of the language than in creating cultural artefacts. These Esperantists started to be called *finvenkistoj*, i.e. believers in the Final Victory, i.e. the moment when everybody will speak Esperanto as a second language. The result is that for decades Esperantists were divided into two fiercely contrasting ideological parties. This paradigm was finally considered a false dichotomy by the latest generation of young TEJO Esperantists, who in 2012 composed a resolution at the World Congress in Hanoi (my translation from Esperanto):

In the youth movement we are used to working both for the development and strengthening of the Esperanto community and culture, as well as for the diffusion of the neutrally human international language. We believe that TEJO's action can be completely and largely defined as "Raumistic finvenkism" (*raŭmisma finvenkismo*).<sup>9</sup>

There is still a radical group that hopelessly tries to form an "Esperanto nation" based on the concept of diasporic statelessness, but this minority group is marginalised by the mainstream Esperanto Movement. The concept of diasporic minority has been rejected by the majority of Esperanto speakers, for being too nationalistic.

## 5. Esperanto and linguistic rights in the Digital Era

Two other major events deeply influenced the Esperanto Movement in the 1990s: the collapse of the USSR and the invention of the World Wide Web. After the end of the Soviet era, many national Esperanto societies in Eastern Europe entered a crisis that forced UEA to rethink its geopolitical role and therefore its language ideology. In fact, UEA's role as a bridge across the Iron Curtain did not make any sense anymore. In 1996 a new Manifesto was signed in Prague. Unlike all other previous documents, this one was immediately translated into dozens of languages. In other words, the Prague Manifesto was directed at the Esperanto community

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9. Original Esperanto text follows: "En la junulara movado jam estas kutime labori kaj por evoluigo kaj fortigo de la Esperanto-komunumo kaj kulturo, samkiel por la disvastigo de la lingvo internacia, neŭtrale homa. Ni kredas ke la TEJO-agado povas esti pli komplete kaj amplekse difinita kiel raŭmisma finvenkismo."

of practice and the external world at the same time. We can compare it to the Universal Declaration on Linguistic Rights, written in the same year by the World Commission on Linguistic Rights, a non-official body of NGOs and other organisations working in the field of linguistic law under the auspices of UNESCO. While the Universal Declaration on Linguistic Rights is fourteen pages long and consists of 52 articles, the Prague Manifesto numbers but two pages and seven articles long. Gobbo (2016) analyzed the text twenty years after its publication, stating that the Prague Manifesto inserted two concepts in the ideological discourse of Esperanto: justice (pertaining to the domain of ethics) and effectiveness (pertaining to the domain of economics). While the first concept, expressed in various ways, was always present within the Esperanto Movement – even if implicitly – the second one was an absolute novelty in the context of Esperanto ideological documents. In fact, the idea here is that the effectiveness of Esperanto can be measured in quantitative terms. This idea has been around for a while (see Fantini & Reagan 1992), but it was never put at the forefront of communication with the external world by the Esperanto community itself. An example is point 3 (official translation, italics included):

3. Pedagogical Efficiency. Only a small percentage of those who study a foreign language begin to master it. A full understanding of Esperanto is achievable within a month of study. Various studies have ascribed propaedeutic effects to the study of other languages. One also recommends Esperanto as a core element in courses for the linguistic sensitisation of students. *We assert that the difficulty of ethnic languages always will present obstacles to many students, who nevertheless would profit from the knowledge of a second language. We are a movement for effective language instruction.*

The idea of the practical utility of Esperanto is slowly gaining ground again in the language representation of its language activists. For decades, Esperantists could work for Esperanto only during their free time: in other words, they earned their living elsewhere. This is still the case for most members of the Esperanto community of practice; however, some initiatives are heading in another direction. It seems that the latest generation of Millennials is following Zygmunt Bauman's (2000) idea of 'liquid modernity', which states that all social entities (such as political parties, universities, churches, and – by extension – the Esperanto Movement, expressed by national societies and other associations) are responding with increasing flexibility and fluidity in order to adapt in a fast-changing world. In particular, the more the World Wide Web spreads, the more members of the Esperanto community are potentially attracted, thanks to free courses on the internet. Brick and mortar schools and local Esperanto clubs still carry on the work, but have been forced to adapt to the new situation. One of the most influential Esperantists of the web generation is Chuck Smith, an American polyglot based in Berlin. He opened the

Esperanto Wikipedia, launched the Duolingo English-Esperanto course and the homonymous app (400,000 learners in one year, on September 2017 more than one million learners enrolled, in its English-based version) and co-founded the mobile app *Amikumu* (“do the friend thing”), launched in April 2017. The aim of the app is to connect speakers of the same language and be in contact with them through chatting. Esperanto was the first language to be used, and the Esperanto community performed the test phase (the author was an alpha and beta tester). The UEA is a major sponsor of *Amikumu*. This app actualises Hodler’s idea of Esperanto living primarily through the networking of individuals.

The web generation introduced new traits into the language ideology of Esperanto. In 1905 Zamenhof decided to free Esperanto from his author’s prerogative to fend for itself, as a gift to humanity. In 1985, something very similar happened with the establishment of the Free Software Foundation by Richard Stallman (2002), the legal framework that became famous with Linux and Wikipedia. It is not by chance that Linux and the popular free software office suite LibreOffice can be installed in an Esperanto version: the web generation considers Esperanto as if it were free software *ante litteram*. I have had the occasion to note that many male young Esperantists born after year 2000 are either computer scientists or polyglots, often both. Although there are no surveys to confirm this observation, the fact that the quality of web sites and mobile apps dealing with Esperanto is generally quite high can be considered an indicator of a positive correlation between the web culture and Esperanto. Other non-traditional ways to discover Esperanto matters include Hollywood languages, such as Star Trek’s Klingon or Dothraki of *Game of Thrones*, and comics for collectors (e.g., Tin Tin, Asterix, Pondus, which exist in Esperanto). Perhaps the main challenge currently facing the Esperanto Movement today is not just providing basic courses for beginners, but providing services in the real world for people who have already had some virtual experience with the language.

From a more ideological perspective, Esperanto can become a critical element in the larger framework of alternative globalisation, making the world a better place to live, a world where respect for different cultures will be the norm. Some recent UEA initiatives are heading in that direction. On April 21 and 22, 2016 diplomats, scholars and activists of NGOs actively participated in a symposium, organised by Humphrey Tonkin (University of Hartford), former President of TEJO and UEA, on the topic of languages and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a programme launched by the United Nations in 2015. It is important to note that languages in general, and certainly not Esperanto in particular, are never explicitly mentioned in the SDG objectives, as if linguistic rights were not a pertinent topic for sustainable development. The UEA in this case plays the role of the NGO that advances linguistic rights at all levels.

## 6. Concluding remarks

Although Esperanto is not a contested language according to Nic Craith's definition (2006: 108), nonetheless it shows a considerable degree of contestedness, with its own peculiarities, as illustrated above. Esperanto is contested as a fully-fledged language because of its artificial origin and its ethnical neutrality, which is perceived as a lack of authenticity. The Esperanto Movement tries to counter these attacks through a complex ideological elaboration, mainly – but not solely – through the elaboration of the concept of neutrality. The three examples of non-mainstream Esperanto Movements (left-wing, Christian ecumenical, vegetarian) demonstrate how Esperanto's soft ideological basis allows other non-linguistic ideologies to enter the Esperanto community of practice with their own agenda intact. Ultimately, Esperanto has become a space of encounter of different people using Zamenhof's creation as their common link.

The motivations behind contestedness may differ, but the results are similar to what happens to many other contested languages, i.e. Esperanto is simply ignored and omitted from public discourse. Moreover, its vitality relies mainly on language activists, as is the case with many contested languages. The debate around the Manifesto of Rauma can perhaps be extended in the case of contested languages (let's call them C-ishes): my hypothesis is that all language activists both care about C-ish and its vitality (a sort of "Rauma") as well as struggle for the official recognition of C-ish from the external world ("Final Victory"). They represent two sides of the same coin, rather than two conflicting parties, as the abovementioned TEJO resolution in Hanoi suggests. However, before confirming this hypothesis, further research is needed.

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