

Esperanto and Education: A Brief Overview

Articles (updated where necessary) from the forthcoming Routledge

Encyclopedia of Language Teaching and Learning

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ESPERANTO (1185 words)

An international language designed for ease of learning and intended as a common, neutral second language for all. Launched in Warsaw in 1887 as "the international language of Doctor Esperanto" (ps. of L.L. Zamenhof, 1859-1917), Esperanto is the only *planned language to have achieved relatively wide use; between five and fifteen million people are estimated to have studied it, although regular users probably do not exceed one percent of this number. Most speakers live in Europe, but the movement has a long history in countries such as China, Japan and Brazil, and active users can be found in most countries of the world.

Esperanto uses a modified Latin alphabet of 28 letters; its phonology is similar to that of Italian or Croatian. A unique morphological feature is its use of word endings to mark parts of speech: nouns end in -o, adjectives in -a, adverbs in -e; the simple past, present and future tenses of every verb end in -is, -as and -os respectively, without distinction of number, person or gender. Word roots are invariant and can be freely combined with each other as long as the result is meaningful, e.g. vid-o (sight), vid-a (visual), vid-e (by sight, visually), vid-i (to see); ebl-o (possibility), ebl-a (possible), ebl-e (possibly), ebl-i (to be possible); combining these roots yields vid-ebl-a (visible), vid-ebl-i (to be visible), etc. Most word roots are drawn from Western European languages, with a small number of Slavic and non-European elements. Word order in a sentence is relatively free, similar to Russian; cases other than the nominative are distinguished by the use of prepositions or the multipurpose marker -n. Richardson 1988 provides a straightforward introduction; Janton 1993 discusses some distinctive linguistic features; Jordan 1992 is a detailed reference guide for English speakers.

There is ample anecdotal and statistical evidence of Esperanto's relative ease of acquisition for speakers of both European and non-European languages, although any level of mastery clearly demands greater time and effort from the latter. Among the factors that appear to increase learnability are the close relationship between written and spoken forms, the productivity of the word-building system, the low frequency of irregularities and idiomatic expressions, and the relative openness of the speech community to new learners. Attempts at quantitative comparison have generally estimated the rate of progress in Esperanto as four to twelve times that of other second languages taught under classroom conditions. An early study is Thorndike et al. 1933; good overviews are provided by Maxwell 1988, Fantini and Reagan 1992, and Corsetti and La Torre 1995.

Such research has also frequently reported a positive "propædeutic" effect on the learning of other languages. For instance, English secondary school pupils who studied Esperanto for a year were subsequently found to achieve better results after three years of French than those who

studied only French for four years (Williams 1965). The effects were strongest for pupils who scored low on a range of intelligence tests (Halloran 1952). Similar results have been reported for native speakers of Finnish (learning Esperanto followed by German), German (Esperanto/English), Japanese (Esperanto/English) and Italian (Esperanto/French; see overviews listed above). Esperanto study has also been found to improve students' performance on general (native) language tests (Wood 1975; Piron 1986; Pinto and Corsetti 2001), and to enhance various other kinds of language awareness (Fettes 1997).

For many language teachers, Esperanto is especially valuable in helping to establish contact with people of very diverse backgrounds, in contrast to the association of other foreign languages with one or two national cultures. By means of international correspondence between classes of similar ages, the language can help make geography and social studies more exciting and meaningful to the learners. Among the more long-lived initiatives of this kind are the Freinet school movement, where Esperanto has occasionally been used since the 1920s; the project *Graĵnoj en Vento* (Seeds in the Wind), which functioned in a number of European countries in the 1960s; and the California-based network "Children Around the World", which has been in existence since the 1980s. The first Internet-based project of this kind, *Interkulturo*, opened a "virtual school" in September 1999 with participation from schools in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas (the school, together with descriptions in several languages, is located at <http://lps.uniroma3.it/kler/>).

Formal school-based instruction of Esperanto is nonetheless relatively uncommon. Many active users are self-taught, while others learned the language in evening classes or intensive courses. There is a wide variety of teaching methods and materials for all of these situations, including some designed for international use. Two examples of the latter are the Cseh method, also known as the "direct method" because of its reliance on oral Esperanto without translation, and the Zagreb method, which uses L1 translations to achieve rapid comprehension of a set collection of Esperanto texts and then trains learners in the active use of this core vocabulary. There is presently no international system of teacher certification or assessment, but national systems exist in several countries, usually under the administration of the national Esperanto association or the national affiliate of the International League of Esperanto-Speaking Teachers (ILEI). The latter, an organization in operational relations with UNESCO, also administers international examinations in Esperanto at two or three levels, testing oral and written communication skills as well as linguistic competence and knowledge of Esperanto culture. (Introductions to the latter can be found in Forster 1982, Janton 1993 and Richardson 1988.)

At the university level, Esperanto is usually taught within departments of linguistics, often as part of a course or program in *interlinguistics; the programs at Eötvös Lóránd University (Budapest) and Adam Mickiewicz University (Poznan) stand out among a few dozen courses worldwide. In North America the longest-running credit program is the three-week summer workshop at San Francisco State University (begun in 1970, and recently transferred to the School for International Training in Brattleboro, Vermont). Graduate theses on Esperanto have most often been written from a linguistic standpoint, but have also originated in such fields as history, comparative literature and sociology. A fairly complete overview of current publications appears in the section "Auxiliary languages. International languages" of the MLA International Bibliography of Books and Articles on the Modern Languages and Literatures.

Esperanto has been criticized on a number of grounds, although usually on the basis of a priori arguments rather than empirical studies. Its alleged lack of a cultural base, its European lexicon and phrase structure, and its perceived association with naive utopianism or a rootless cosmopolitanism have all been frequently cited (e.g. Mead and Modley 1967). A more telling barrier to its wider use in education, however, is its lack of economic and demographic power and political recognition, which all but rule out its inclusion in the "foreign language" curriculum in many countries. Teachers wishing to teach Esperanto in a classroom setting must therefore usually relate it explicitly to broader curricular goals such as multicultural education, social studies, or language awareness. Works which could help to define or articulate such goals include Eichholz and Eichholz 1982, Piron 1994, Richmond 1993, and Tonkin 1997.

Corsetti, R. and La Torre, M. (1995) 'Quale lingua prima? Per un esperimento CEE che utilizzi l'esperanto', *Language Problems and Language Planning* 19.1: 26-46.

Eichholz, R. and Eichholz, V.S. (eds.) (1982) *Esperanto in the Modern World*, Bailieboro: Esperanto Press.

Fantini, A. and Reagan, T. (1992) *Esperanto and Education: Toward a Research Agenda*, Washington: Esperantic Studies Foundation.

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Forster, P. (1982) *The Esperanto Movement*, The Hague: Mouton. Halloran, J.H. (1952) 'A four year experiment in Esperanto as an introduction to French', *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 22: 200-204.

Janton, P. (1993) *Esperanto: Language, Literature, and Community* ed. H. Tonkin, trans. H. Tonkin, J. Edwards & K. Johnson-Weiner, Albany: SUNY Press.

Jordan, David (1992) *Being Colloquial in Esperanto: A Reference Guide For Americans*, Lanham: University Press of America.

Maxwell, D. (1988) 'On the acquisition of Esperanto', *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 10: 51-61.

Mead, M. and Modley, R. (1967) 'Communication among all people, everywhere', *Natural History* 76.12: 56-63.

Pinto, M.A. and Corsetti, R. (2001) 'Ricadute metalinguistiche dell'insegnamento dell'esperanto sulla lingua materna dell'alunno: Un'esperienza nella scuola media italiana' (Metalinguistic benefits of planned language instruction: The case of Esperanto in an Italian secondary school), *Language Problems and Language Planning* 25. 1: 73-90.

Piron, C. (1986) 'L'espéranto vu sous l'angle psychopédagogique' (Esperanto from the standpoint of educational psychology), *Education et Recherche* 8.1: 11-41.

Piron, C. (1994) *Le défi des langues: Du gâchis au bon sens* (The Language Challenge: From Rummage to Reason), Paris: L'Harmattan.

Richardson, D. (1988) *Esperanto: Learning and Using the International Language*, Eastsound: Orcas.

Richmond, I. (ed.) (1993) *Aspects of Internationalism: Language and Culture*, Lanham: University Press of America.

Thorndike, E., Kennon, L. and Eaton, H. (1933) *Language Learning: Summary of a Report to the International Auxiliary Language Association in the United States*, Division of Psychology, Institute of Educational Research, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.

Tonkin, H. (ed.) (1997) *Esperanto, Interlinguistics and Planned Language*, Lanham: University Press of America.

Williams, N. (1965) 'A language teaching experiment', *Canadian Modern Language Review* 22.1: 26-28.

Wood, R. (1975) 'Teaching the interlanguage: Some experiments', *Lektos: Interdisciplinary Working Papers in Language Sciences*, Louisville: University of Louisville, 61-81.

PLANNED LANGUAGES (444 words)

Spoken or written languages that have evolved on the basis of written projects, usually with the goal of facilitating international communication. Such projects began to multiply in the second half of the 19th century and now number over a thousand, but very few have acquired a community of users. Planned languages in this sense are distinct from the philosophical language projects, whose history dates back to Descartes, and fantasy languages such as Tolkien's languages of Middle-Earth, although the three traditions share some common roots: see Eco 1995. Three classic sources are Couturat and Leau 1979 (first published in 1903/1907), Haupenthal 1979 (a collection of historical texts), and Blanke 1985 (the most complete treatment to date); a readable popular treatment is Large 1985. More detailed works and articles are listed in the section "Auxiliary languages. International languages" of the MLA International Bibliography of Books and Articles on the Modern Languages and Literatures.

By far the most widely learned and taught planned language is *Esperanto, based on an 1887 project by L.L. Zamenhof. Although no other project has come close to this range of use, two can currently claim an international speech community: Ido, based on a 1907 project by Louis Couturat, which combines features of Esperanto with a number of radically different ideas, and Interlingua, based on a 1951 project of the International Auxiliary Language Association and intended as a compromise between the major European languages. Others with small groups of users and advocates include Glosa, based on a 1943 project by Lancelot Hogben, which

combines a lexicon drawn from Classical Greek with many features of English syntax, and Loglan/Lojban, two derivatives of a 1960 project by James Cooke Brown, intended to maximize logical consistency and linguistic neutrality and thereby to test the relationship between language, thought, and culture. Projects of historical interest include Volapük (1879), Latino sine Flexione (1903), Occidental/Interlingue (1922), Novial (1927) and Basic English (1935).

A wide range of claims have been made for various planned languages, including ease of acquisition, logical structure, lack of ambiguity, suitability for human or machine translation, internationality or neutrality, propaedeutic (or "transfer of training") effects, broader effects on language awareness, and so on. Evaluating these claims is one of the objectives of *interlinguistics, a discipline dedicated to the study of planned languages and to the optimization of international linguistic communication in general. The two major orientations to interlinguistics are the semiotic, exemplified by Eco 1995 and Sakaguchi 1998, and the sociological, exemplified by Blanke 1985 and most of the contributions to Schubert 1989 and Tonkin 1997. In practice nearly all of the work in the sociological tradition has focused on Esperanto.

Blanke, D. (1985) *Internationale Plansprachen: Eine Einführung* (International Planned Languages: An Introduction), Berlin: Akademie-Verlag.

Couturat, L. and Leau, L. (1979) *Histoire de la langue universelle. Les nouvelles langues internationales* (History of the Universal Language. The New International Languages), Hildesheim-New York: Olms.

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Hauptenthal, R. (ed.) (1976) *Plansprachen. Beiträge zur Interlinguistik* (Planned Languages: Contributions to Interlinguistics), Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchgesellschaft.

Large, J.A. (1985) *The Artificial Language Movement*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Sakaguchi, A. (1998) *Interlinguistik: Gegenstand, Ziele, Aufgaben, Methoden* (Interlinguistics: Topic, Goals, Functions, Methods), Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang.

Schubert, K. (ed.) (1989). *Interlinguistics: Aspects of the Science of Planned Languages*, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Tonkin, H. (ed.) (1997) *Esperanto, Interlinguistics, and Planned Language*, Lanham: University Press of America.

INTERLINGUISTICS (57 words)

A branch of language science that investigates (a) the design and function of international *planned languages, and (b) *language planning for international or intercultural communication. Interlinguistics is thus unrelated to the SLA concept of "interlanguage", although its field overlaps with second- and foreign-language studies in a number of ways, most evidently in the case of *Esperanto.

Blanke, D. (1985) *Internationale Plansprachen: Eine Einführung (International Planned Languages: An Introduction)*, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag.

Sakaguchi, A. (1998) *Interlinguistik: Gegenstand, Ziele, Aufgaben, Methoden (Interlinguistics: Topic, Goals, Functions, Methods)*, Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang.

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