

Previous interlinguistic research

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Esperanto – Lingua Franca and Language Community

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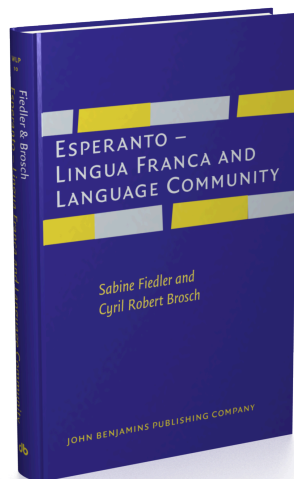
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Previous interlinguistic research

Esperanto is the only planned language (see Chapter 7 for a more thorough description and definition of this and the other terms used here) for which an independent philology has emerged. Esperanto studies (esperantology), as a subdiscipline of interlinguistics, explores both the language Esperanto, including its sources, structure, communicative potential and development, and its speech community (Blanke, 1985). The discipline developed as a result of discussions on changes in Esperanto (which finally led to the emergence of a new planned language project, Ido, as a modified Esperanto – see Chapter 7). René de Saussure, brother of the renowned Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, is regarded as the founder of Esperanto studies with his work on the theory of word-formation in Esperanto (Anderson & L. de Saussure, 2018; de Saussure, 1910).

Only a few institutions conduct ongoing research on Esperanto. A pioneering role was played by the International Auxiliary Language Association (IALA) between 1924 and 1954 (see Blanke, 1985, p. 167–73). The Association was founded to promote the study of auxiliary languages and to identify the most suitable. Therefore, much of its research addressed the question of what an optimal auxiliary language should look like.

IALA brought together a number of outstanding linguists of its day, such as André Martinet, Otto Jespersen, Edward Sapir, Charles Bally, and Albert Debrunner. In 1951, its director Alexander Gode published a naturalistic planned language, *Interlingua* (see Chapter 7). In 1968 the US-based Esperantic Studies Foundation (ESF) was founded and has since then, and especially since an increase in its capital in 1999, supported numerous practical and scientific projects aiming to study Esperanto and interlinguistics and disseminate knowledge about them. Among the most important projects sponsored by ESF are websites for learning and teaching Esperanto (<http://lernu.net> and <http://edukado.net>), the creation of a corpus of written Esperanto (<http://tekstaro.com>), symposia and summer schools on interlinguistics and Esperanto, and the postgraduate studies programme in interlinguistics at Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań (Poland).

Interlinguistics and Esperanto studies are official subjects at just a handful of universities. An important place where Esperanto has been taught since the 1950s is the University of Amsterdam. In 1997 a Special Chair in Interlinguistics and Esperanto was established there on behalf of the Universal Esperanto Association (UEA),

enabling continuous teaching and research in this field. Postgraduate Esperanto studies at Adam Mickiewicz University were established more than two decades ago, a kind of offspring and continuation of the regular programme of Esperanto studies, now discontinued, at Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in Budapest, which was the first and only programme of this kind after the Second World War (1966–2006).¹⁰

Numerous specialist journals regularly publish research articles on interlinguistics and Esperanto studies. Among them are *Language Problems & Language Planning* (Benjamins), which in 2021 was in its 45th year of publication and includes an interlinguistics section, the journal *Esperantologio/Esperanto Studies* formerly published at Uppsala University (1999–2018; the journal is now published by CED), the series *Interlinguistica Tartuensis* published by the University of Tartu, Estonia (with seven volumes from 1982 to 1990 and an eighth volume in 2006), and *Język. Komunikacja. Informacja* ('Language. Communication. Information', Poznań). Last but not least, the German *Gesellschaft für Interlinguistik e. V.*, founded in 1991, organises annual conferences on interlinguistics and publishes their proceedings (more than 25 volumes so far).¹¹

Sociological research on the Esperanto speech community includes a number of monographs on the membership of national organisations, such as the British and German Esperanto Associations (Forster, 1982 [based on a survey conducted in 1968]; Stocker, 1996). Rašić (1994), in a small-scale study carried out in the mid-1980s, explores demographic characteristics and attitudes of participants of a World Esperanto Congress. His study, together with some others that he analyses in his book, finds that Esperanto speakers have a higher educational level than the average population and extensive language proficiencies.¹² There are more male than female Esperanto speakers, and those who are politically interested and organised are often found to belong to the political left (Alòs I Font, 2012, p. 31; Stocker, 1996).

Richard E. Wood (1979) mentioned three characteristics of the Esperanto speech community in the title of his essay, "A Voluntary, Non-Ethnic and Non-Territorial Speech Community", terms which have lost nothing of their significance. The fact that there are people who speak Esperanto as one of their mother tongues does not

10. For a list of theses on interlinguistic topics produced at ELTE, see *Interlinguistische Informationen* 99 (2016, pp. 10–17).

11. See www.interlinguistik-gil.de. The working language of the society is German.

12. A survey conducted by Fiedler (1998), including 500 readers of the magazine *Esperanto*, showed that Esperanto speakers learn on average 3.5 foreign languages beyond Esperanto (*Kiujn aliajn lingvojn vi lernis?* 'What other languages have you learned?') and speak on average 1.6 foreign languages beyond Esperanto (*Kiujn aliajn lingvojn vi parolas?* 'What other languages do you speak?') (see also Alòs I Font, 2012, p. 27).

contradict the quality “voluntary”, as we will see in Chapter 10. As membership of the Esperanto speech community is not based on genealogical characteristics, factors such as race and tribe, it is undoubtedly a non-ethnic community. It is noteworthy, however, that its ever-increasing common cultural tradition has induced researchers to use the term “quasi-ethnic community” (see, for example, Fettes, 1996; Mel’nikov, 1992). The third feature, “non-territorial”, refers to the fact that Esperanto speakers are geographically dispersed. A number of authors compare the Esperanto speech community to a diaspora. Although its speakers, of course, cannot look back on life in a common territory as is normally the case with diasporas, there are some properties they have in common with communities living as a diaspora (e.g. Becker, 2006; Blanke, 2003; Fliegner, 2003; Piron, 1989b; Tonkin, 1997), as we shall see in subsequent chapters.

Recent work dealing with the Esperanto speech community has focused on the identity of Esperanto speakers (Caligaris, 2016; Fians, 2018, 2021; Koutny, 2010; Stria, 2017) and on the changes that can be observed concerning linguo-political and -ideological orientations after the 1960s (Fiedler, 2018b; Galor & Pietiläinen, 2015; Gobbo, 2016; Pietiläinen, 2010; Tonkin, 2006).

A state-of-the-art article (Pereltsvaig, 2017) provides an overview of the development of Esperanto studies with a focus on work that has been done in core disciplines in linguistics, such as the morphology, phonetics, and the syntax of Esperanto, but also fields like gender, linguistic typology, second-language acquisition and humour. The overview provides an impressive picture of Esperanto research, above all against the backdrop of the conditions described above, but it also reveals a large number of research desiderata calling for exploration.

