

The aim of this book

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Esperanto – Lingua Franca and Language Community

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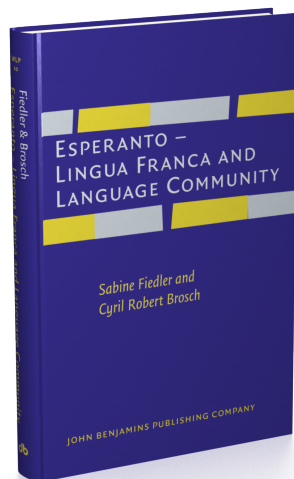
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CHAPTER 4

The aim of this book

The goal of this study is to address the research gaps identified in the previous chapter. We intend to find answers to the following questions:

- In which speech situations and domains is Esperanto presently used (scientific discourse, private talk, family life, business conversations etc.), serving as an efficient means of communication, and which domains are blind spots when it comes to the use of Esperanto?
- How do Esperanto speakers proceed when encountering problems of communication? Are there, for example, any language-specific strategies for coping with lexical or terminological gaps?
- Are there systematic differences between the Esperanto found in textbooks or in literature and the Esperanto actually used in lingua franca communication? Are there linguo-structural differences between written and spoken Esperanto?
- Can the frequent claims that Esperanto is “easier than other languages” and “fully expressive” be verified in any way?

Independently of the question of whether the use of a planned language is worthwhile, research on this under-researched subject can provide us with insights relevant to linguistic phenomena in general, among them:

- As planned languages are “lingua francas by design”, the comparison between their practical use and the use of other lingua francas, especially English, can improve our knowledge of lingua francas as such. Are the characteristics that are ascribed to lingua franca communication general lingua franca features? Or are they rather properties of the lingua franca that is presently most frequently used in this function – English? What are the main characteristics of communication by means of a lingua franca? This not only concerns purely linguistic aspects, but also sociological circumstances of its production, e.g. the diaspora-like character of Esperanto.
- The Esperanto speech community delivers a particularly straightforward example of intercultural communication, the peculiarities of which can be studied here in a nutshell, without the many interferences resulting from a particular ethnic culture. How does its study improve our knowledge of intercultural communication? To what extent is intercultural communication by means of

Esperanto influenced by culture-specific traits that its use has produced within the Esperanto speech community?

- How do extralinguistic factors like speaker attitude influence linguistic behaviour? Intriguing parallels can be found when we compare the Esperanto speech community with communities of ethnic minority languages, as Kimura (2010, 2012) has shown.
- Another point of general interest in linguistics is the standardisation of languages that lack (a significantly large group of) native speakers as the central force that usually guarantees their stability. This includes ethnic languages that maintain certain degrees of usage despite no longer having native speakers, like Latin or Sanskrit, and revived languages, like Cornish (Kimura, 2010, 2012).
- Given the unusually small number of Esperanto native speakers, what are Esperanto speakers' attitudes towards "ownership" of the language? Do they regard Esperanto as a foreign language like any other, or do its speakers regard it as somehow different?

By addressing these questions, we hope, first and foremost, to learn more about the generally under-studied topic of Esperanto communication and, secondly, to contribute to research that goes beyond Esperanto and can have an impact on the work of researchers in other (linguistic) disciplines. We are, however, not concerned at all with the questions of whether Esperanto should be adopted as one or even **the** language of the European Union or the world, or whether it should be a compulsory subject in schools, nor with prognoses about whether the planned language will grow or decline, be ousted by competing planned languages, or any other questions related to phenomena which are not strictly (socio)linguistic in nature. We rather leave such issues to political scientists and philosophers, not without hope, however, that these will make use of our findings in their own argumentation.