

Planned languages and interlinguistics

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Esperanto – Lingua Franca and Language Community

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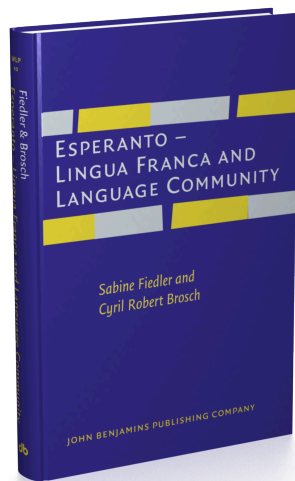
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Planned languages and interlinguistics

The term “planned language” first appeared in its German original *Plansprache*. It was introduced by Eugen Wüster as a translation of Jespersen’s (1928) *constructed language* in his 1931 dissertation on terminology standardisation.¹⁷ Following Wüster, Blanke (1985, p. 53, 2018, p. 9) defines a planned language as “a language consciously created by an individual or group of people, in accordance with defined criteria, with the goal of facilitating international linguistic communication”.

Planned languages can be considered a result of language planning. As a number of researchers have stressed, there is no dichotomy between natural and artificial languages. Ethnic languages undergo language planning and there is much natural development in planned languages, so that this aspect of linguistic reality is reflected more adequately by the model of a continuum than by a binary distinction, a continuum (or scale) running from “consciously developed” to “unconsciously developed” (Schubert, 1989, p. 10). Esperanto does not stand out as an isolated extreme, but it certainly represents a very good example of language planning processes, as these extend to its complete corpus, i.e. all levels of its linguistic system. As early as 1908, Baudouin de Courtenay pointed out that between the transformation of only individual linguistic details and the transformation of the whole language there is only a quantitative, but not a qualitative difference.¹⁸ This was confirmed by more recent representatives of language planning, e.g. Tauli (1968, p. 27) who explicitly includes the creation of planned languages in his definition of language planning.¹⁹

In the understanding of the definition above, a typical planned language is, first, consciously created, second, serves communication, and, third, has a worldwide scope. The first criterion sets it apart from so-called “ethnic” or “national languages” (often incorrectly referred to as “natural languages”), which came into being with

17. Wüster wanted to find a German expression for Jespersen’s term that was more suitable than *konstruierte Sprache*, which was used in the German translation of Jespersen’s book (“Eine internationale Sprache” 1928) (Wüster, 1976/1955, pp. 272f.).

18. “Między przekształceniem pewnych tylko szczegółów językowych a między przekształceniem całego języka zachodzi różnica jedynie ilościowa, nie zaś jakościowa.” (Baudouin de Courtenay, 1908, p. 10).

19. Cf. his definition: “LP [Language Planning] is the methodical activity of regulating and improving existing languages or creating new common regional, national or international languages.”

the emergence of an ethnic group or were, in the case of pidgins, created spontaneously without deliberate planning. The second criterion distinguishes planned languages from languages constructed for the expression of artistic needs, such as languages of fiction like Quenya (*The Lord of the Rings*), Klingon (*Star Trek*), or Dothraki (*Game of Thrones*) (Peterson, 2015).²⁰ The third criterion makes them distinct from (partly) planned ethnic languages like Modern Hebrew, which fulfil the first two criteria, but are bound to a certain ethnic group and have a smaller set of sources.

There are various ways to classify planned languages. A subdivision based on historical criteria, as presented by Duličenko (1989, 1990), lists a total of 917 planned language projects constructed in no fewer than forty countries from the second century to our era until the 1970s. New projects continue to appear. Duličenko's statistics show a small peak in the middle of the seventeenth century, when Latin started to lose its status as a universal language. The largest number of language projects appeared between 1850 and 1950, however, when, against the background of technological advances in international trade and travel, the variety of languages represented a growing obstacle. From a sociolinguistic perspective, planned languages can mostly be categorised according to the following four criteria:

- A. **According to the relationship of the planned language systems to ethnic languages, especially with regard to their lexical material.** This is the traditional classification of Couturat and Leau (1903+1907), who distinguish between (a) a priori systems, (b) a posteriori systems, and (c) mixed systems.²¹ Whereas the majority of a priori languages (often created by philosophers, e.g. George Dalgarno in 1661 or John Wilkins in 1668) form their phonological and lexical systems on the basis of philosophically motivated classifications of human knowledge, an a posteriori system borrows lexical material from specific ethnic languages (usually Latin, Greek, and Romance) and adapts it to its structure. Within the a posteriori systems, an autonomous (or schematic) subgroup can be found with a high degree of regularity in inflection and word formation (e.g. Ido, see below), while the so-called naturalistic subgroup (e.g. Interlingua, see below) deliberately forfeits some regularity for the sake of the easy recognisability of the source material. A third group within the a posteriori languages are modified or simplified ethnic languages like Basic English. An example of a mixed system, having both a priori and a posteriori traits, is Volapük (Schleyer, 1982 [1879]), which comprises heavily modified material from ethnic languages (see below).

20. The latter are very popular nowadays on the Internet. However, their community mainly uses English as its language of communication.

21. See Schubert (2018) for a detailed discussion of the history of these notions.

- B. **According to the form of realisation.** Besides systems that can be both written and spoken (pasilalies), or planned languages, there are also written-only projects (pasigraphies), which again can be divided into a priori and a posteriori systems. An example of an a posteriori pasigraphy is the ideographic writing system Blissymbolics (originally called Semantography) which has been used as a method to teach disabled children to communicate (see Okrent, 2009, pp. 153–199; Maradan, 2012).
- C. **According to their authors' intentions.** One group of motives includes the humanistic aims of pacifism and international understanding. The authors hoped that a common language could eliminate conflicts and wars between peoples and races. Another group of motives is based on language philosophy. For example, in the seventeenth century, Gottfried W. Leibniz (1690 [1666]) and René Descartes (1629) outlined ideas of an ideal, logically constructed language that would promote rational thinking. Otto Jespersen's project Novial (1928) is closely related to his linguistic ideas. In the same way, Interlingua by Alexander Gode (1951) has to be seen in connection with the ideas of Benjamin Lee Whorf on language relativism, and thus as an attempt to model Whorf's notion of the Standard Average European (see below). Other language projects, such as Adalbert Baumann's *Wede* (Weltdialekt/Weltdeutsch; Baumann, 1915), are based on purely nationalistic and chauvinistic ideas. Finally, the interest and pleasure in manipulating linguistic elements in creative and innovative ways should not be underestimated. Very often, different motives overlap.
- D. **According to their actual use** (see Blanke, 1985, pp. 105–108, further refined in Blanke, 2006, pp. 49–98). Ninety-nine percent of all systems remain confined to their authors or their inner circles. As these languages never really fulfilled the communicative function of a human language, Blanke calls them "planned language projects". Fewer than ten projects (see below) achieved, at least for some time, a moderate degree of dispersion, which makes them appear in some but not all domains that are found in living languages. Such examples are called "planned semi-languages" (*Semiplansprachen*) by Blanke. Real "planned languages" in a narrow sense, according to Blanke, appear in virtually all domains in which ethnic languages are used, so that functionally such languages are not discernible from ethnic languages. The only example he considers a member of this group today is Esperanto, which has left its competitors far behind. Using a scale of 28 levels, Blanke (2000, pp. 52–57) describes the transition from a language project to a language, from the "manuscript" (step 1) to a "developed language with language change" (step 28).

We consider the differences expressed in these classifications to be an important basis for research on planned languages. This is especially true for Blanke's typology,

which is not only of theoretical value as it takes the social character of language into account, but also of great practical relevance. While one might have a different opinion about whether systems such as Ido and Interlingua (see below) should be placed in the second or third group, projects that have never been applied in communication cannot be compared to Esperanto with its rich communicative history. This difference is ignored when authors employ formulations like ‘artificial languages such as Volapük and Esperanto’ or ‘planned languages such as Esperanto or Basic English’, as is often done today.²² From the point of view of realised communication the differences, for example, between Esperanto and Basic English are bigger than between Esperanto and English.

The planned language systems that grew beyond publication and have found real-life applications are small in number and typologically very similar:

- They are morphologically reduced; agglutinating or inflecting,
- they are mostly head-initial (prepositions, preposed determiners, postposed relative phrases), having accusative alignment, and SVO word order,
- they have a definite, sometimes also indefinite article,
- their lexicon is based mainly on Greek, Latin, and Romance internationalisms,
- they are written with the Latin alphabet.

The main differences concern orthography (phonemic vs etymological), the grade of regularity, the amount of bound morphology (synthetic vs analytic), and redundancy. In the following paragraphs we characterise, in chronological order, the most important planned language systems, or planned semi-languages in Blanke’s terminology, before we concentrate on Esperanto and its speech community in Chapters 8 and 9.

Volapük, published in 1879 by the German Roman Catholic priest Johann Martin Schleyer, was the first project of a planned language to gain a wider audience. The language differs considerably from other projects due to its alphabet: besides the cardinal vowels *i e (/e/) a o u*, it includes the German umlauts *ü (/y/)* *ö (/ø/)* *ä (/ɛ/)*. Volapük words are accented on the last syllable. The morphology is very rich, and nevertheless regular, with adjectives following the noun, and there is no article. The lexicon consists, on the one hand, of many *a priori* elements (pronouns and many other function words) and, on the other, of *a posteriori* elements changed beyond recognition for reasons of phonotactics and simplification (e.g. *Vol-a-pük* < *world, speak*; *limep* < *emperor/imperator*; *bevü* < *between*).

22. The quote by Cassin presented in Chapter 1 is an example. The French philologist equates Leibniz’s ideas about a universal language or script with a fully fledged language like Esperanto.

For some ten years the language, or at least the idea, spread rapidly among the European middle class. After two meetings in Germany, at which participants mainly spoke German, the third Volapük congress in Paris in 1889 was the first international event in the history of mankind to see a planned language in use. But it also marked the beginning of the decline of the movement, as Volapük did not stand the test as a means of communication. The language disappeared as rapidly as it had attracted attention: as Schmidt (1963) indicates, at the end of 1888 there were a thousand people who had diplomas as teachers of Volapük, 257 Volapük clubs (among these, 107 in Germany, twenty-three in Italy, twenty-one in Austria-Hungary, seventeen in Switzerland, fifteen in Sweden and Norway, thirteen in the USA, nine in Spain and Portugal, five in France) and twenty-three Volapük journals, of which only twenty-seven clubs and four periodicals remained in 1900. In addition to the linguistic properties which made the language difficult to learn, Schleyer's autocratic personality led to Volapük's decline. Schleyer saw the language as his property and rejected changes proposed by the Volapük Academy, disregarding the sociological dimension of a community of speakers. There was an attempt to revive the language through a reformed Volapük by Arie de Jong (1931), which is the basis of its use today by a very small group of people.

Latino sine flexione ('Latin without inflections') is the only version, among many, of a simplified Latin to have been used in practice. It was proposed in 1903 by the Italian mathematician Giuseppe Peano. As is deducible from its name, the language uses the Latin lexicon (with the addition of words for modern concepts from Romance languages), but omits almost all of its morphology, using word order and function words instead. For example, nouns and adjectives are not declined in *Latino sine flexione* itself, and the plural ending *-s* is only used where plurality is not marked otherwise (e.g. by means of cardinal numbers). The past and future tenses are generally indicated by adverbs; if necessary, past time can be expressed by placing *e* before the verb (*me e bibe* – 'I drank') and future time by *i* (*me i bibe* – 'I will drink').

Latino sine flexione was supported between 1909 and 1939 by an organisation dedicated to the promotion of planned languages, the Academia pro Interlingua, which was a continuation of the Volapük Academy. The language was mainly applied in scientific texts, which were published primarily in the periodical *Schola et Vita* (1926–1939). Barandovská-Frank (2002, pp. 17–20) mentions the following fields: astronomy, biology, ethnology, interlinguistics, culture, linguistics, literature, mathematics, medicine, pedagogy, psychology, sociology, and technology. It fell out of use completely after the Second World War, but served as inspiration for Interlingua, a planned language system created by the International Auxiliary Language Association (IALA) in 1951 (see below).

Ido was created in 1907 by the Frenchmen Louis Couturat and Louis de Beaufront and touted as an improved version of Esperanto.²³ The linguistic differences between Ido and Esperanto are not vast, with the result that speakers of the two languages can understand each other.²⁴ Ido dropped the diacritics and obligatory accusative of Esperanto, abandoned Zamenhof's a priori table of correlatives (see Chapter 11), and suppressed the concordance of nouns and adjectives. Many German and Slavic roots were replaced by Romance elements. While the lexicon was "naturalised" (i.e. root forms were less modified so as to be more easily recognisable), word formation became considerably more schematic and redundant than in Esperanto. Some elements from Ido, mostly lexemes, were later adopted by Esperanto.

The publication of this offspring of Esperanto (the suffix *-id* means 'descendant/offspring') fractured the Esperanto community, leading to the so-called Ido schism (see Chapter 8). Among the speakers who left Esperanto for Ido were influential intellectuals, such as Louis de Beaufront, Wilhelm Ostwald and Otto Jespersen. For some twenty years a flourishing language movement similar to the Esperanto movement existed. The language was used for scientific communication (see Gordin, 2015, pp. 148–156), and the dictionaries compiled for Ido were "the most complete works of their kind for any system of planned language" (Jacob 1947, p. 46; see also Blanke 1985, pp. 188/189). The spread of the language, however, was hampered by ongoing linguistic reforms. Only after the Second World War, when Ido had lost most of its speakers to Occidental and later Interlingua (see below), was a stable norm reached; the production of fiction also began. Today Ido continues to play a role, with a small community of a few hundred speakers, regular international meetings (of 30 to 40 participants) and several journals.

Occidental, which after the Second World War was renamed **Interlingue**, was published in 1922 by the Baltic German Edgar von Wahl (also known as Edgar de Wahl). In opposition to the autonomous Esperanto and Ido, Occidental-Interlingue is a naturalistic project designed to resemble Western European languages as much as possible. The system is mostly analytical, with an accusative only in the realm of the personal pronouns. The orthography is etymological, while the accent is sometimes

23. For details on the authorship of Ido see Blanke (1985, p. 187) and Garvía (2015, pp. 134–137). See also Chapter 8.

24. In fact, multiple occasions show that Esperanto and Ido speakers can understand one another. For example, in a report about a language exhibition in Berlin in 2017, an Ido journal states: "Dum la konversi di Esperantisti kun ni, li uzis Esperanto e ni Ido sen havar mis-kompreni" [During the conversations of Esperanto speakers with us, they used Esperanto and we Ido, without mis-comprehension] (*Ido-saluto* 2017/4, p. 4).

irregular to preserve the pronunciation of borrowed words. Word formation does not so much serve to coin new words as it helps to promote the use of many international words (e.g. the adjective *defensiv* ‘defensive’ in Occidental-Interlingue is a regular derivation from *defender* ‘to defend’). This principle of converting verb infinitives into derived nouns and adjectives has become known as de Wahl’s rule.

In its first two decades many speakers of Ido went over to Occidental, but with the appearance of Interlingua (see below) in 1951 most of its adherents switched to this even more consistently naturalistic project. Nowadays Occidental-Interlingue, which interestingly resulted in hardly any international meetings or literature with a non-linguistic scope, is scarcely used.

Basic English (= British American Scientific International Commercial English) was created by Charles Kay Ogden in 1930. It is a reduction of English (i.e. Standard English) with its irregularities in spelling and grammar to a minimal vocabulary of 850 words. These include 600 “things” (with 400 “general” and 200 “picturable”), 150 “qualities” (i.e. adjectives), of which 50 are “opposites”, and 100 “operations” (including function words and only 18 verbs). Words that are not part of this core vocabulary have to be paraphrased. For example, *remove* is replaced with *take away*, and *dwarf* becomes *a man much smaller than normal size*. The number of 850 does not stand up to critical examination, however, as Ogden did not count “localised names”, “measuring terms” or “special vocabularies”. The claim suffers further when we consider that words can be used as different parts of speech (e.g. *back* as a noun and an adverb) (for a more detailed description see McElvenny, 2018, pp. 82–87).

There were extensive efforts to promote Basic English in the 1930s and 1940s, including by Winston Churchill. A number of texts were published, including belles lettres and scientific literature, for example on electrical engineering, geology and economics. Basic English represented a model for some other projects of modified ethnic languages, such as Basic Slovak, and it was used occasionally as a propaedeutic for learning English.

Interlingua was published in 1951 by the International Auxiliary Language Association (IALA) and designed mainly by its director, the German American Alexander Gode. Since the 1920s, IALA had been a pioneering organisation exploring the use of planned languages in many studies and experiments. This knowledge, however, was not exploited for Interlingua by Gode, who on the contrary wanted to create “Standard Average European” postulated in the framework of the famous Sapir-Whorf hypothesis on linguistic relativism (Whorf, 1956). The language is based on so-called “control languages”, which means that a word enters Interlingua if it can be verified in corresponding forms and with corresponding meanings in at least three of the following languages: (1) Italian, (2) French, (3) Spanish and Portuguese (combined), and (4) English. German and Russian act as possible

substitutes. Interlingua's lexicon is combined by an analytical grammar similar to English (no agreement of adjectives, no personal endings with the verb). There is no autonomous word formation. The orthography is etymological (*th, ph, ch, y, rh*).

In the 1950s and 1960s the language spread in science: a number of medical journals published abstracts in Interlingua, and there were two scientific journals, *Spectroscopia Molecular* and *Scientia International*, from 1952 to 1955 (Gordin, 2015, pp. 219). The language is still alive today, being the biggest of Esperanto's marginal competitors, with new books (including fiction) published regularly and international meetings organised by the International Interlingua Association *Union Mundial pro Interlingua* (U.M.I.) every second year. As the latter are attended by about 30 to 50 people (for comparison: the traditional Esperanto world congress, known as the UK ("Universala Kongreso"), has in the last 20 years attracted on average 1,800 participants), it can be assumed that there may be a few hundred or perhaps a thousand speakers of Interlingua today.