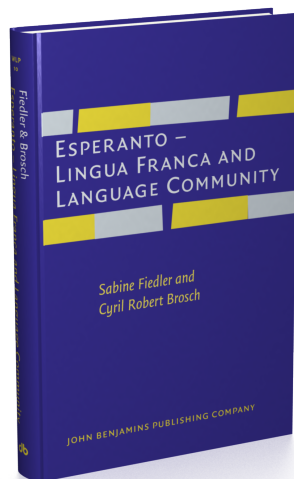


# The use of Esperanto for artistic purposes

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**Sabine Fiedler and Cyril Robert Brosch**

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## The use of Esperanto for artistic purposes

The authors of literary works, in particular fantasy and science fiction literature, have come up with various ways of solving the communication problems in their imaginary worlds. Some rely on technology, introducing devices such as the “Babelfish” in Douglas Adams’ *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*. Others invent languages or have them created by linguists, such as in the cases of Klingon in the TV series *Star Trek* or Dothraki in *Game of Thrones*. In addition, there are authors who decide to have their protagonists speak a pre-existing constructed language. Examples include H. G. Wells’s novel *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933), in which the world in 2050 communicates in Basic English, and the novels of Eberhardt del’ Antonio (see Mannewitz, 1997) and Harry Harrison’s *The Stainless Steel Rat* series, in which Esperanto is spoken. Harrison even includes a description of Esperanto in the appendices to his books.<sup>62</sup>

In a similar vein, Esperanto can be found in films and plays. One example of a whole film in Esperanto (though it was not shot for an Esperanto-speaking audience) is the 1966 horror movie *Incubus*, starring William Shatner. The film makes use of the language in order to achieve an effect of alienation. Originally, the actors were requested to speak nonsensical gibberish or Volapük, but they refused these two options. However, since they did not know how to pronounce the language properly (or did not care), the Esperanto they speak is hard to understand even for Esperanto speakers.

A very creative use of the language, although probably not very amusing for the overwhelmingly pacifist Esperanto speech community, is found in *Esperanto, the Aggressor Language*. Seeking to create a realistic enemy (with its own uniforms, structures, and language) for military manoeuvres, but without risking the indignation of a given country, in the late 1950s the US Army published this Esperanto handbook to provide the fictional opponents, named simply “Aggressor”, with a neutral language. As a newsreel video (available on YouTube) shows,<sup>63</sup> this practice

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62. It is reported that quite a number of readers became interested in Esperanto through Harrison’s novels or contacted the Esperanto Association in the US for further information about the language (see the journal *Esperanto* 2/95, p.38). Harrison was the honorary president of the Esperanto Association of Ireland and an Honorary Patron of UEA.

63. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kZ2ei7e6aAs>.

was in active use for some time. However, the film shows that the soldiers acting as “Aggressor” had no proper phonetic training in Esperanto.

A similar inspiration characterised the 1939 film *Idiot’s Delight*, starring Norma Shearer and Clark Gable. Here Esperanto serves as the language of a fictitious country in Central Europe, with signs, storylines and even songs appearing in the language. Esperanto also serves as a neutral background language in other films, e.g. *The Great Dictator* (1939), *State Secret* (1950), *Street Fighter* (1994), *Gattaca* (1997), and *Blade: Trinity* (2004).

An example of a film in which the use of Esperanto is more closely related to the ideals connected with the language is *Doreamon: Nobita and the Island of Miracles* (2012), which is based on the popular Japanese manga and anime series *Doreamon*. Here Esperanto is spoken on a miraculous island where prehistoric animals have survived alongside the human inhabitants, who have lived in peace for a long time and do not have armed forces.<sup>64</sup>

The stage play *Felici Tutti* (2011) by the Italian theatre collective Controcanto uses Esperanto as the language of refugees, giving this group of people a universal character as migrants without being specific about their home country or origin. In addition, because of the Romance-based lexis of Esperanto, many words are instantly recognisable to an Italian audience.

As the examples show, the use of Esperanto (or another planned language) in artistic contexts is mainly motivated by the desire to characterise a country or ethnic group as different, or, in the case of fantasy and science fiction, exotic. It renders neutrality without losing authenticity and credibility (see Chapter 7, and also Fiedler, 2019b).

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64. We owe the information about this film to Goro C. Kimura. For a survey of Esperanto and cinema, see also <http://delbarrio.eu/cinema.htm>.