

The use of the glottonym *Esperanto*

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Esperanto – Lingua Franca and Language Community

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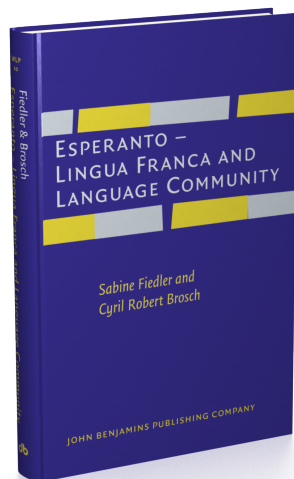
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The use of the glottonym *Esperanto*

Gubbins (1997) and Blanke (2002) studied the use of the word *Esperanto* in journalistic texts, with the first author selecting English, French and German newspapers and the second focusing on German contexts. The authors found that the glottonym is dominantly used in metaphorical senses. One of these is “universality”, i.e. something is provided for or accessible to the whole world or all members of a particular group, as in the following examples about the arts:

*Les textes des chansons des spectacles sont écrits dans un **espéranto** créé pour l'occasion, et parfois teintés de français, de chinois ou même de Swahili.* [The song lyrics of the shows are written in an Esperanto that was created for the occasion and that is sometimes tinted by French, by Chinese or even by Swahili.]

(*Le Monde* 18 April 1995, from Gubbins, 1997, p. 265)

Fortunately ... they still speak a brand of musical **Esperanto** that engages with an international audience.

(*The Guardian* 22 March 1995, from Gubbins, 1997, p. 266)

*Die Volksmusik ist das **Esperanto** aller Schweizer.* [Folk music is the Esperanto of all Swiss people.]

(*Tagblatt* 5 July 1999, from Blanke, 2002, p. 126)

Sometimes the word is used to express the “mixed character” of the language, based on the fact that Esperanto’s vocabulary represents a mixture of several sources (Blanke, 2002, pp. 133–136). The examples found in the press can be both positively connotated (as ‘varied’ or ‘rich’) and negatively connotated (as ‘an elusive hotchpotch’):

(On the songs of the Italian singer Milva) *Ein **Esperanto**, das sich aus vielen Sprachen nährt und doch sehr vertraut klingt.* [An Esperanto that is nourished by many languages, but sounds familiar nevertheless.]

(*Offenbach-Post* 23 January 2002)

*Die Spontangerichte aus Joops Kochbuch sind in seinen Domizilen Potsdam, New York, Hamburg und Monte Carlo entstanden und so liest man sich durch ein wahres **Esperanto** von kulinarischen Happen.* [The spontaneous dishes in Joop’s cookbook were created in his domiciles in Potsdam, New York, Hamburg and Monte Carlo, and this is why it reads like a true Esperanto of culinary snacks]

(*Der Spiegel* 14 October 1999)

(On a TV schedule) *Man kann jetzt auch zum Fernsehen zu doof sein. Ein TV-Programm liest sich wie Esperanto: Vieles kommt einem bekannt vor, aber verstehen tut man's doch nicht.* [You can now be too stupid even to watch TV. A TV schedule reads like Esperanto: much of it sounds familiar, but nevertheless you can't understand it.] (Saarbrücker Zeitung 14 November 2001)

Die Unterhaltung läuft in 'Donau-Esperanto' – einer radebrechenden Mischung aus Deutsch, Englisch, Französisch, Russisch und Handzeichen. [The conversation runs in "Danube Esperanto" – a broken mixture of German, English, French, Russian and gestures.] (Passauer Neue Presse 4 July 1999)

Gubbins (1997, p. 266) points out some metaphorical uses in the world of computing. He finds this association with modern technology and progress surprising, given that the language is "often portrayed as moribund and outmoded".

With translation software we are seeing the first stages of a type of electronic Esperanto for the written word (The Observer 19 June 1994)

Solar-powered computers ... an international language, some sort of Microsoft Esperanto (The Guardian 14 July 1994)

See also the following examples from Blanke's (2002) collection:

Die Datenübertragung zwischen Computern, das sogenannte TCP/IP-Protokoll ..., war als plattformunabhängige Sprache zwischen unterschiedlichen Wissenssystemen geplant, eine Art Computer-Esperanto über die Telefonleitung. [The data transfer between computers, the so-called TCP/IP protocol ... was planned as a platform-independent language between different knowledge systems, a kind of computer-Esperanto via telephone line.] (Tagesspiegel 25 February 2000)

Zum Esperanto der Computerwelt könnte die neue Jini-Technologie von Sun Microsystems avancieren. [The new Jini technology from Sun Microsystems could advance to an Esperanto of the computer world.] (Subway 3/1999)

Clearly negative is the metaphorical use of *Esperanto* in the sense of "levelling down", "monotony" or "drab uniformity":

(about architecture:) *Im allgemeinen Sog der Globalisierung wird die Entscheidung getroffen werden, ob wir unter Druck des Marktes und der virtuellen Realität zu einer Esperanto-Architektur kommen oder ob es nicht doch gelingt, eine eigene erkennbare, eigenständige Architektur zu schaffen.* [In the general maelstrom of globalisation, the decision will be taken whether, as a result of the market and of virtual reality, we end up with an Esperanto architecture or whether we will nevertheless manage to create our own perceptible individual architecture.]

(Der Standard 21 December 2001, from Blanke, 2002, p. 139).

Eine Chance der Bühnen, sich gegen das „globale Kultur-Esperanto der Pop-Kultur“ und die „internationale Shopping-Mile-Identität narkotisierter Konsumenten“ zu behaupten, sieht Löffler im Konzept Thomas Ostermeiers. [Löffler sees in Thomas Ostermeier’s concept a chance for the theatre to survive against the “global cultural Esperanto of pop culture” and the “international shopping-mall identity of drugged consumers”.] (Die Welt 10 June 1999)

Gubbins (1997) finds a large number of uses in political contexts, as the press in his corpus frequently refers to the late German chancellor Helmut Kohl’s infamous misrepresentation of Esperanto in *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (24 May 1995): “Wir wollen kein Esperanto-Europa, sondern ein Europa, in dem alle ihre Identität behalten” [We do not want an Esperanto Europe, but a Europe in which everyone retains their identity.]

Quantifying their data, the two authors find accordingly that about half of all metaphorical uses of Esperanto carry negative connotations. They conclude that Esperanto speakers and organizations face a considerable challenge in altering the language’s image. As Gubbins (1997, p. 267) puts it, “[Esperanto’s] success will be measured, among other ways, by changes in journalistic discourse which link the language’s name more firmly to the enduring quest for human dignity and equality.”

