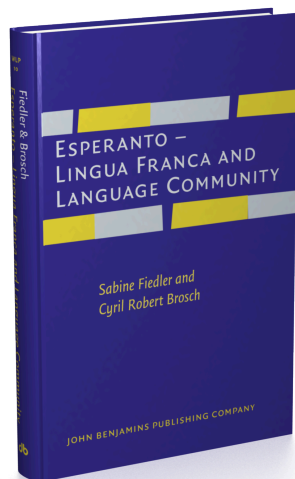


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 <https://doi.org/10.1075/wlp.10.c15>

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Esperanto – Lingua Franca and Language Community

Sabine Fiedler and Cyril Robert Brosch

[*Studies in World Language Problems*, 10]

2022. xx, 429 pp.

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The use of Esperanto words in branding

This chapter addresses a symbolic use of Esperanto that has recently gained currency and was first described by Brosch (2016). It is the use of Esperanto words outside the speech community in designations for products, institutions and projects. Against the background of the general lack of knowledge about the language and its use, and its low prestige among those who claim to know it, and as has just become evident in the use of the glottonym *Esperanto*, this phenomenon is surprising, because any marketing department's decision to use an Esperanto word as their brand name is, of course, motivated by a desire to boost their brand's image. In the following we will present some of the most interesting examples of this type of brand naming together with the reasons that the name givers had in mind.

Nuessel (1992, p. 89) suggests that brand names should be characterised by the following features in order to be successful:

1. visual comprehension
2. pronounceability in most languages
3. avoidance of objectionable or absurd meanings
4. positive references
5. ease of recall
6. conformity to legal prerequisites for official registration.

We will return to some of these properties in the discussion of our examples.

Although the quantifiable use of Esperanto words as names for products and institutions is a recent phenomenon, some early examples exist. One of these is described by Heller (2017, pp. 17–18): the watch company L.A.I. Ditesheim et Frères, founded in 1881 in La Chaux-de-Fonds, a centre of the Swiss watchmaking industry. Esperanto was well known in Switzerland at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, when it was used by the Red Cross and promoted by Edmond Privat, a peace activist, university professor and writer who is known in the Esperanto speech community, among other things, as Zamenhof's biographer. In 1905, at the height of enthusiasm for Esperanto, with the first international Esperanto congress taking place in Boulogne-sur-Mer and the *Fundamento de Esperanto* accepted as the immutable basis of the language, Ditesheim decided to change the company name to *Movado* ('movement'). "Esperanto's internationalism

and rationality were harnessed to clean, modern design”, as Heller (2017, p. 18) describes Ditesheim’s motivation. Modernity is still the focus of the brand, as a look at its website (www.movado.com) and its slogan “Movado – Modern ahead of its time” reveals, and the history of its naming is also part of advertising strategies today.

(...) The year 1905 was momentous for the company. That was the year the name “Movado” was adopted. A word meaning “always in motion” in the international language of Esperanto. This new name proved to be a visionary choice.

Over the past 134 years, Movado has been a brand in motion, always changing, always innovating, always moving forward. (...) This is what makes Movado ahead of its time. (<https://jhyoung.com/brand-feature-movado/>)

A more recent example is a slogan in Esperanto that the International Police Association, founded by Arthur Troop in the United Kingdom in 1950, has chosen: *Servo per Amikeco* (‘service through friendship’) (see Figure 4).

A document about the history of the association gives background information on why a slogan in Esperanto was chosen:

The IPA motto, “Service Through Friendship” was coined by Troop but he thought it might be best in another language. After trying French, German, Italian, Spanish and Latin, Troop contacted Bob Hamilton of Glasgow. Hamilton was an expert in the International Language Esperanto. Hamilton translated the motto into “SERVO PER AMIKECO”. It is appropriate that Esperanto was chosen as it was developed in 1887 by L.L. Zamenhof as a politically neutral language. (“The History of the International Police Association” 2015: 13–14) (https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.ipa-usa.org/resource/resmgr/history/IPA_INT_History.pdf)

In this context it is also interesting to mention that the predecessor of the association, the World Police League, had as one of its aims to “[s]pread [the] auxiliary language, Esperanto, among police worldwide to allow more direct and faster communication between the police forces of various countries”. (https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.ipa-usa.org/resource/resmgr/history/IPA_INT_History.pdf, p. 8)

As the last quotation in particular illustrates, these examples, although still in use today, are closely linked with the history of the Esperanto movement. They date from a period when the world was still looking for a means of international communication, a language that would facilitate mutual understanding beyond national borders – a time when Esperanto had a good chance of becoming that language, when there was “a window of opportunity for the cause of an artificial language”, as Garvía (2015, p. 3) puts it. The modern trend to choose an Esperanto word as a brand name must be based on different motivations. In the following we will present some of those reasons and illustrate them by means of examples. They are ordered according to frequency, taking a collection of eighty-eight examples (Brosch, 2016) as a basis.

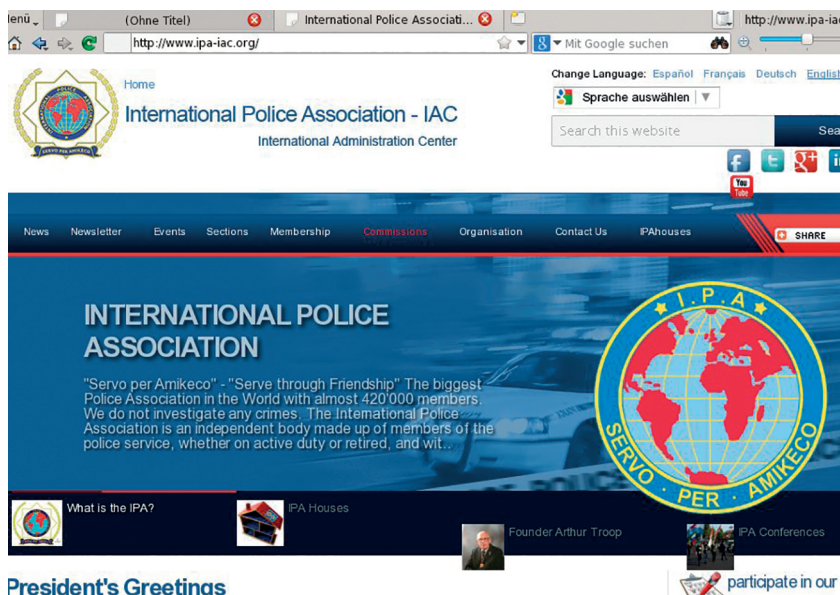


Figure 4. Screenshot of the International Police Association website

- a. “Esperanto is an international (universal) and neutral language; the use of Esperanto words is to express the idea that everybody should be addressed and feel involved”

The so-called refugee crisis of the past few years has given rise to a large number of charity organisations, several of which chose Esperanto names. One of them is *Alveni* (‘arrive’), run by Caritas (see Figure 5). Its founders explain their choice of name as follows:

Esperanto haben wir gewählt um allen gerecht zu werden. Viele unserer Klienten haben Begriffe aus ihrer Heimatsprache vorgeschlagen. Da wir aber nicht den Eindruck erwecken wollten besonderer Ansprechpartner für einen bestimmten Kulturkreis zu sein, haben wir uns für die Weltsprache Esperanto entschieden.

[We chose Esperanto in order to please everyone. Many of our clients proposed expressions from their native languages. Since we didn’t want to give the impression that we were a point of contact for people of one specific culture only, we chose the universal language Esperanto.] (personal correspondence)



Figure 5. Screenshot of the *Alveni* homepage

Another example is the music group *Kaŝita kanto* ('hidden song'):

Da unsere Texte in verschiedenen Sprachen verfasst sind, fiel es uns schwer uns auf einen Namen in nur einer Sprache zu beschränken, weshalb wir uns letzt[t]lich für Esperanto entschieden haben. Zudem gefiel uns die Idee, die hinter diesem Sprachkonzept steht: nämlich eine möglichst neutrale und jedem zugängliche Weltsprache zu formulieren.

[As our texts are written in various languages, it was hard for us to confine ourselves to a name in just one language, which is why we eventually chose Esperanto. Additionally, we liked the idea behind this linguistic concept: to formulate a universal language that is as neutral and as accessible as possible.]

(personal correspondence)

b. “Esperanto as a language aims at equality and understanding between peoples. An Esperanto word is chosen to show commitment to and support for these ideas”

A product known around the world is the probiotic beverage *Yakult*. However, it is hardly known nor evident from its form that this name stems from Esperanto. It goes back to *jahurto*, a variant of the more usual *jogurto* ‘yoghurt’. The form was evidently adapted to be more easily pronounceable for the Japanese market at which it was originally directed. The firm’s website explains the origin of the name:

Dr. Shirota decided to put the lactic acid bacteria he discovered in a milk drink easy to metabolize and to drink. He named it Yakult. This name comes from “jahurto” which in Esperanto means yogurt. At the time of Dr. Shirota, it was believed that this new language could have been an international one common among all peoples. The choice of this name, written in Western characters since the beginning, shows the forefront cosmopolitan approach of the Yakult’s “father” who, in his vision, wished the product distributed in all the world.

(<https://yakult.com.mt/1935-2/>)

A manufacturer of electric scooters gives two reasons for choosing its name, *Unu* (‘one’): first, this is an expression of support for Esperanto’s idea of uniting the world; second, it reflects the company’s understanding of *Unu* as ‘unique’, as every *Unu* scooter is assembled individually according to the client’s wishes.

Dass wir ein Esperanto-Wort gewählt haben ist natürlich kein Zufall, wir sind vielmehr Fan von der Idee eine Sprache zu kreieren, die alle Menschen vereinen soll, indem sie für alle verständlich sein soll – was wir auch auf unsere Produkte projizieren können, da wir von Beginn an das Ziel einer Internationalisierung verfolgen. „unu“ deshalb, weil jeder unserer Scooter einzigartig ist, sprich, der Roller wird einzig für den Kunden produziert, erst sobald dieser sein individuelles Produkt zusammengestellt und bei uns bestellt hat – wir produzieren weder auf Lager noch „Standardmodelle“.

[That we have chosen an Esperanto word is, of course, no coincidence, rather we are fans of the idea of creating a language aimed at uniting all people by being comprehensible for everyone – which is something that we also project onto our products, as we have pursued the target of internationalisation from the beginning. “unu” for the reason that each of our scooters is unique, that is to say, the scooter is produced uniquely for the customer, once they have composed their individual product and sent the order to us – we do not produce stock, nor are there any “standard models”.]

(personal correspondence)

c. “Esperanto words are chosen as names because they sound nice”

In the non-Esperanto-speaking world, the fact that a word sounds pleasant and is easy to pronounce can be just as important as semantic considerations. One example is a school circus project that was looking for a suitable name for their performance:

Wir sind ein Schülerzirkusprojekt einer Gesamtschule mit Schülern multikultureller Herkunft. Wir hatten als Thema den Absturz unserer Artisten im Regenwald / Traumwelt zwischen Tier und Mensch und Phantasie. Auf der Suche nach verschiedenen (wohlklingenden) Wörtern für Dschungel sind wir (nach einer Abstimmung) bei **Gangalo** hängengeblieben. Die Wahl des Wortes hat sich voll rentiert (Neugierde, Interesse und antizipatives Denken an Dschungel hatten sich eingestellt!) (personal correspondence, *ĝangalo* = ‘jungle’)

[We are a circus project at a comprehensive school with pupils from a variety of cultural backgrounds. The theme of our project was our circus performers’ crash-landing in the rain forest / the dreamworld between animal and human being and imagination. In search of several (pleasant-sounding) words for ‘jungle’, (after a vote) we decided on *Gangalo*. This choice of word was a complete success (it aroused curiosity, interest and conjured up images of the jungle!)]

(personal correspondence, note: the Esperanto word for ‘jungle’ is *ĝangalo*)

The online Esperanto periodical *Libera Folio* (2015–03–34) included a report on a Russian-language webpage on Crimea whose founder had decided to give it an Esperanto name (*krimeo.ru*). The article quotes the founder’s motives as follows:

Mi penis, ke la nomo estu ne “io ajn”, sed ke ĝi plaĉu, bele sonu, asociiĝu kun Krimeo kaj estu facile memorebla. (...) Kredu, kiam mi ekvidis la vorton “Krimeo” mi tuj vere enamigis al ĝi. Ĝi aspektis kaj sonis ĝuste tiel, kiel mi volis.

[I tried to find a name that was not just “any name”, but one that would be pleasing, sound nice, be associated with the Crimea and be easy to remember. (...) Believe me, when I saw the word “Krimeo”, I immediately fell in love with it. It looked and sounded exactly the way I wanted it to.]

Similarly, for a Swedish online telephone information portal, a main criterion for a name was that it sound nice. They contacted the local Esperanto society asking for suggestions and decided on *Eniro* (‘going in, entrance’).

d. “The meaning of Esperanto words is recognisable”

As we have seen in the example of the circus project above, it is useful to have a name that is semantically transparent for speakers of other languages (*Gangalo* gave rise to associations with ‘jungle’, which the pupils called “anticipatory thinking”). This aspect was also one of the motivations for calling a Hamburg shop for electric vehicles *Trankvile* (‘calm, quiet’). As a newspaper reports, its founder wished that the paperboy who kept waking him up every morning with his noisy scooter had a silent e-vehicle. He chose the Esperanto word because of its international intelligibility and the analogy between the simple structures both of e-scooters and of Esperanto:

Ich wollte gern als Unternehmen einen ‘sprechenden Namen’ nutzen, der international verständlich ist. Hierzu bietet sich gerade Esperanto an. (...) Trankvile wird sofort verstanden.

[I wanted the business to have a “telling name” that could be understood internationally. Esperanto is ideal for this (...) People understand Trankvile immediately.]
(personal correspondence)

Analog zur Weltsprache Esperanto, das durch Vereinfachung der Grammatik einer leichteren Verständigung dient, sind Elektrofahrzeuge sehr viel einfacher konstruiert als Verbrenner und bieten bedeutende Vorteile.

[By analogy with the world language Esperanto, which serves easier communication by means of a simplified grammar, electric vehicles are constructed much more easily than combustion engines and have enormous advantages.]

(<https://www.openpr.de/news/872181/TRANKVILE-electric-vehicles-eroeffnet-neuen-Laden-in-Hamburg.html>)

e. “Words are not yet trademarked”

What Nuessel (1992) called “[c]onformity to legal prerequisites for official registration” seems to be increasingly important in the Internet era, with its enormous potential for e-commerce. Finding a catchy name for a new online venture can be a challenge, and taking a detour via another language can be helpful.

In order to avoid trademark problems with the former name “Bilbo Blogger”, in 2009 the developers of this free/libre KDE blogging application started a forum brainstorming for a new name. Finally they chose *Blogilo* (‘blog tool’), an Esperanto name, because

“It has a good meaning[...],
It’s short,
It’s global and worldwide,
And It’s like Blog+Bilbo.”

(<https://momeny.wordpress.com/category/blogilo/>)

The problem of finding suitable domains was also mentioned by the owner of a webtool for project management who decided to call it *Kunagi* ('to collaborate, act together'). A Swedish Esperanto journal reports:

(la posedanto) diris ke apenaŭ plu ekzistas bonaj anglaj vortoj por uzi en domajno. [...] Pro tio li konscie komencis uzi Esperanton kiel fonto de bonaj vortoj por programoj kaj domajnoj. <https://web.archive.org/web/20140104005132/http://esperantosverige.se/enhavo/artikoloj-legeblaj/58-kat-esperanto-uzata/esperanto-enla-mondo/283-ankau-neesperantistoj-uzas-esperanton> [(the owner) said that there were hardly any good English words left to use in domains (...) Therefore, he intentionally began using Esperanto as a source of good words for programmes and domains.]

These examples show that in the majority of cases there is a combination of reasons for choosing a name in Esperanto. Such is the case with our final example: a quotation from the owner of a Polish company selling used 3D printers named *UZATA* ('used'). In his answer to our request for information about the company's name he mentions no less than six reasons, including some of those mentioned in (a) to (e) above and two more:

Z Esperatno (sic) zetknąłem się w szkole średniej, XXXI l.o. w Łodzi im. Ludwika Zamenhofa (<http://lo31.pl/>). Jako, że patronem naszej szkoły był twórca Esperanto, nauczycieleprzekazywali nam o nim informacje, oraz było również koło naukowe Esperanto (już go niema), na którym można było uczyć się języka. Powodów dla którego używam Esperanto do nazywania moich projektów jest kilka:1: Słowa są zrozumiałe (dosłownie lub intuicyjnie) przez miliardy ludzi2: Brzmią dobrze – Zamenhof spędził sporo czasu by wyrazy były optymalnym połączeniemspółgłosek i samogłosek ponadto3: Są łatwe w wymowie4: Są łatwe do zapamiętania5: Jest bardzo dużo wolnych domen z rozszerzeniem .com6: Nazwa w Esperanto jest ekskluzywna, nadaje projektowi powagę i prestiżu. (personal correspondence)

[I got to know Esperanto at high school, in the 31st high school "Ludwik Zamenhof" in Łódź (<http://lo31.pl/>). As our school was named after the creator of Esperanto, our teachers told us about him, and there was also an Esperanto society (which no longer exists) in which we could learn the language. There are several reasons why I use Esperanto for naming my projects: (1) the words are understandable for billions of people (directly or intuitively); (2) they sound good – Zamenhof spent a lot of time creating words that are an optimal combination of consonants and vowels; (3) they are easy to pronounce; (4) They are easy to remember; (5) there are many free domains with the ending .com; (6) a name in Esperanto is exclusive, it lends repute and prestige to a project.]

Esperanto speakers are of course delighted when a word from their language is chosen as a name of a product, project or institution. In 2012, an Internet poll was set up to find a name for the new public bicycle service in Warsaw. Of the six pre-selected proposals, the Esperanto name *Veturilo* ('vehicle') came in first place,

probably because of support from Esperanto speakers from around the world, who had heard about the poll and the possibility of helping an Esperanto name win.

However, we also notice that words are sometimes misunderstood or misspelt. In many cases it is the diacritics (i.e. the letters *ĉ ĝ ĥ ĵ ŝ ŭ*) that cause problems. People who do not speak the language are not aware that a missing accent can cause a difference of meaning and they are not familiar with the surrogates *ch gh hh jh sh u* (see Chapter 11), so that they often simply omit the diacritic (as in our example Gangalo – *ĝangalo* ‘jungle’). Let us finish this chapter by giving two examples that are related to those spelling peculiarities, where, interestingly enough, the users of Esperanto words were able to solve their problem in clever and creative ways. The first is *AGO* (‘action, deed’), an organisation operating social institutions, particularly homes for the elderly. When the founders chose this name, they initially believed it meant ‘age’ (*aĝo* in Esperanto), a suitable reference to the old age of the people they cared for. When members of an Esperanto society pointed out that the word means ‘action’, not ‘age’, they found this an appropriate interpretation of their philosophy and decided just to change the explanation of the word on their webpage.⁶⁵ With the second and final example we return to the music group *Kaŝita kanto*. The diacritic is ignored in the text of their homepage (www.kasitakanto.com). As Figure 6 shows, the group makes playful use of the sign, however, which seems to be floating away like petals or dandelion seeds, or maybe thoughts, on a summer’s day with an ease that reflects the style of their music.

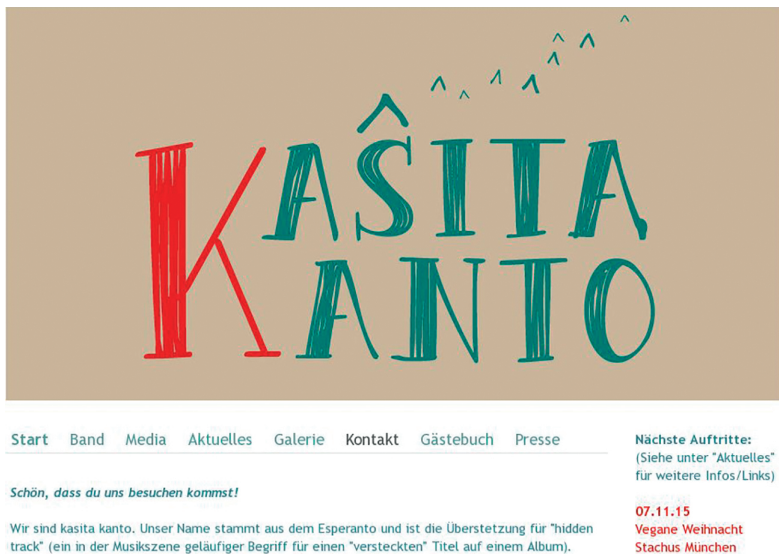


Figure 6. A screenshot of the homepage www.kasitakanto.com

65. See Brosch (2016, pp. 46–47) for the original e-mail reporting the circumstances in more detail.

