

Esperanto and language change

 <https://doi.org/10.1075/wlp.10.c25>

 Available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license.

Pages 325–350 of

Esperanto – Lingua Franca and Language Community

Sabine Fiedler and Cyril Robert Brosch

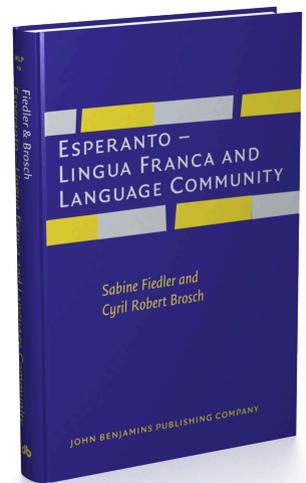
[*Studies in World Language Problems*, 10]

2022. XX, 429 pp.

© John Benjamins Publishing Company

This electronic file may not be altered in any way. For any reuse of this material, beyond the permissions granted by the Open Access license, written permission should be obtained from the publishers or through the Copyright Clearance Center (for USA: www.copyright.com).

For further information, please contact rights@benjamins.nl or consult our website at benjamins.com/rights



Esperanto and language change

25.1 Introduction

Living languages are dynamic phenomena. They vary and change as they are used through time. Translations of the same source text, for example the Bible, from 1600, 1800, and 2000 differ considerably in the same target language. Language changes to serve people's needs. It is an adaptive system, as Larsen-Freeman (2011, p. 49) states, "because it changes to fit new circumstances, which are also themselves continually changing".

It is important to note that language change generally occurs without any conscious planning.¹⁷³ For this reason it is not predictable: it can only be observed afterwards, and not before it begins and mostly not even when it has already begun. Indeed, there are cases where initial indications of language change do not endure, subsequently either disappearing from use or staying confined to local dialects. For example, certain regular outcomes of the High German consonant shift (Low German *dag*, High German *Tag* 'day') like *Berg* > *Perg* 'mountain' are found only in the most southern dialects and proper names today (see Cercignani, 1979, pp. 26–48 for an overview). Croft (2000, p. 3) points out,

I am inclined towards the pessimistic view with respect to language change, which implies that even with perfect knowledge of the initial state, we would not be able to predict a language change.

Language change, however, can also be the result of deliberate efforts. Examples include the emergence of gender-sensitive lexical units or formulations and the results of terminology planning. However, not even language management measures necessarily lead to a predictable outcome in a speech community (Maradan, 2021, pp. 75–77).

In order for linguistic change to happen, of course, there has to be both a linguistic system fit for evolution and a speech community triggering changes. As Blanke (2010, p. 74) ascertains, the phenomenon of linguistic change is a clear indication that a given language can be seen as a living, natural language.

173. In his seminal work on linguistic change, Keller (2003) uses the metaphor of the "invisible hand" acting to constantly change a language.

25.2 Factors influencing language change in Esperanto

As Esperanto is a living language, it undergoes language change. In the literature, however, misconceptions on this topic are frequent (Fiedler, 2015a). One group of authors deny that Esperanto is even capable of evolving. Jones and Singh (2005, p. 182), for example, describe the planned language as “unilateral (emerging from one mind instead of the myriad of interacting ones of a speech community) and importantly, ahistorical and acultural, which we speakers are not”.¹⁷⁴ Another group of scholars make predictions about how the linguistic structure of Esperanto might develop if it were to be adopted worldwide, stating that the language would lose its simplicity and regularity and “massively borrow from English, possibly more than other languages because of its smaller initial stock” (Van Parijs, 2011, p. 43).¹⁷⁵ With this in mind, it seems logical to investigate the phenomenon of language change in Esperanto.

Language change in Esperanto has barely been studied thus far. The few significant studies include Lo Jacomo’s (1981) and Philippe’s (1991) doctoral dissertations as well as a survey article by Blanke (2010) focusing on lexical changes. They describe Esperanto as a living language that has undergone (and continues to undergo) a number of changes. Philippe and Blanke illustrate this with a wide variety of examples, but they do not provide quantitative information about the extent of the phenomena they describe and, most regrettably, they do not indicate the sources of their examples. We see interesting overlaps particularly with Piron’s (1989a) study, in which the author presents authentic examples of semantic, lexical, morphological, and syntactic evolution of spoken and written Esperanto based on his observations during Esperanto meetings and congresses. We will return to some of the issues mentioned in these four studies in Chapter 25.4.

In this chapter, we take into account two closely related phenomena that are decisive for the character of Esperanto. These are, first, the special case of a language that is spoken overwhelmingly as an L2, and, second, the high linguistic awareness of its speakers. The first phenomenon implies a steady source of ethnolinguistic

174. In more detail, the authors point out the following (p. 181):

Assumptions of ‘perfection’ create other problematic issues for inventors and their languages, such as the fact that these creations seem to be expected to function fully in the real world but remain untouched by it. We noted such assumptions earlier in Schleyer’s and Zamenhof’s reluctance to let their creations undergo processes of both deliberate reform and subconscious ‘natural’ language change, and to attempt to prevent – or at the very least control – such processes through both prescriptive codes (such as Zamenhof’s Fundamento) and their authoritarian enforcers such as language academies.”

See also Stewart (1962, 1968), according to whom planned languages (artificial languages) lack “historicity”.

175. For a detailed discussion of these arguments, see Brosch & Fiedler (2018).

influences on Esperanto, hence it can act as a driving force of linguistic change. The second phenomenon can be seen as a compensatory mechanism countering change and stabilising the linguistic norm. Basically, the factors impacting upon the evolution of Esperanto can be subdivided into two groups: factors accelerating language change and those slowing it down.

The following factors **facilitate language change**, as they have destabilising effects on the norm:

– **Influences of previously learned languages**

Esperanto is never a speaker's only language but has to compete with their (usually stronger) other languages. As Esperanto speakers are more polyglot than average (see Chapter 4), this competition is even stronger. The use of Esperanto is therefore constantly influenced by the speaker's other language(s), especially his or her mother tongue.

– **Use as an L2**

Esperanto is usually a speaker's weaker language, as it is most commonly not their native tongue, but is acquired after puberty. Experience shows that a considerable proportion of Esperanto learners do not strive for language perfection (see the description of *eterna komencanto* in Chapter 21.3), as intermediate or even minimal degrees of proficiency allow for considerable communication skills. Acquisition errors or imperfect learning can stimulate language change (Nettle, 1999; Trudgill, 1989).

– **Limited communication opportunities**

The Esperanto speech community is relatively small, and its members are dispersed throughout more than 120 countries on all continents. These circumstances drastically restrict the opportunities to speak the language on a regular basis (see Chapter 24).

– **Linguistic creativity**

The language's agglutinative character enables – or even encourages – its speakers to be creative, i.e. to understand and produce an infinite number of words and utterances. This includes ad hoc formations.¹⁷⁶ In addition, as shown in Chapter 20, Esperanto speakers often engage in “language play” (Crystal, 1998) based on a deliberate manipulation of language rules (see Philippe, 1991, pp. 86–87). Often the resulting innovative forms and uses find their way into everyday language use, initiating language change (see Fiedler, 1999).

176. For example, our dataset includes coinages such as *Ne enkestigu vian scion* (from *en-* ‘in(to)’, *kest-* ‘chest/box’, *-ig* ‘make’ and *-u* ‘imperative’, lit. ‘Don’t put your knowledge into a chest’) spoken by a Cuban teacher at the end of his class, and *postvienaĵo* (from *post* ‘after’, *Vieno* ‘Vienna’ and *aĵ-* ‘thing’) as an email reference line referring to something that should be discussed after a meeting in Vienna.

– Literature and literary influences

Language change can also be stimulated by writers who feel that they need a more extensive and nuanced vocabulary. In the 1980s, a group of Czech poets – known as La Praga Skolo (“The Prague School [of writers]”) – caused heated debate about Esperanto’s linguistic development with their idea that, in order to live up to its artistic ambitions by expanding the lexicon, the literary language should differ considerably from ordinary language use. Karel Pič (1920–1995), although distancing himself from the literary circle, shocked his readers with his linguistic experiments and lists of newly coined words (so-called *piĉismoj*) in the appendices of his works. Eli Urbanová (1922–2012), despite making only moderate use of neologisms in her own works, related the ideas of the school around Josef Rumler (1922–1999) to the Prague linguistic circle’s theories of standard language and functional styles (quoted from Sutton’s translation):

Emanating from his experiences of the necessity of synonymity as a condition for the existence of any style, the general theory on the various styles in language was adapted and applied by Rumler concretely to Esperanto. This division of the vocabulary (lexicon) into individually functioning styles (communal, specialist and literary) makes it possible for us in Prague to orient ourselves in the choice of pertinent words. (Sutton, 2008, p. 455)

Minnaja and Silfer (2015, p. 451) point out that hardly any of the neologisms introduced by the Prague writers or by Pič at the time have survived, and that despite heated debates “the commonly used language is the literary Esperanto of the 1950s, lexicographically codified by Waringhien in the *Plena Ilustrita Vortaro* (Waringhien, 1970)” (Minnaja & Silfer, 2015, p. 256).¹⁷⁷

These factors show their influences especially with regard to lexicon and stylistics. Our more detailed description of the influence of writers reveals that language innovations are not necessarily permanent. This is mainly due to the second group of impact factors that **hamper language change** in Esperanto or even “undo” innovations introduced by individual speakers or parts of the speech community:

– Language awareness

As already explained, Esperanto speakers are very conscious users of the language. Unlike the situation in their mother tongues, they are constantly aware of the planned language’s linguistic norms. Because of their highly developed metalinguistic competence, they resist simply implementing innovations without proper consideration. The relatively low rates of code-switching described in Chapter 22 and the manifold language-related discussions in Esperanto communication (see Chapter 23.2) are indicative of this conservatism.

177. [...] la ordinare uzata lingvo estas la literatura Esperanto de la 1950aj, leksikografie kodita de Waringhien per *Plena Ilustrita Vortaro* (1970).

– **Language loyalty**

Esperanto speakers feel a sense of loyalty to their language in its original state: for ideological reasons, they do not want it to change. Works by Zamenhof and other pioneers enjoy an outstanding reputation among them, and, as described in Chapter 10, for large groups in the speech community the planned language is not only a means of communication, but a cultural asset that must be preserved exactly as it is. Also, most speakers, being familiar with the history of the language including the Ido schism, know that continual change and reforms can be detrimental to the development of a planned language.

– **Dominantly written usage**

Despite its growing use in spoken communication, Esperanto is still more commonly used in writing. Written language tends to be more conservative than spoken language (Fromkin et al., 2007, p. 521; Hernández-Campoy & Schilling, 2012, p. 68; Tsunoda, 2004, p. 188). In Chapter 23 we saw how the oral use of Esperanto follows the codified written standards of the language more strictly than in ethnic languages.

– **Esperanto Academy**

The *Akademio de Esperanto*, which was founded in 1908 (see Chapter 8), aims “(1) to conserve and protect the language according to its norms and to control its development; (2) to explore all linguistic questions concerning Esperanto; (3) to review publications from the linguistic point of view; and (4) to defend Esperanto against all competitors” (*Jarlibro de UEA* 2018, p. 72). Its forty-four members, mainly linguists and writers, work in different fields (grammar, the general dictionary, language for special purposes, phonology, and literature) and represent different countries and mother tongues. The Academy has a mainly stabilising effect on the evolution of the language. It intervenes in cases of non-standard language use and makes recommendations on consistent applications of language rules (for examples, see Chapter 25.5)

– **Use in practice**

Esperanto is a planned language initiated to facilitate communication between people of different mother tongues from all over the world. To achieve this objective the language must be learnable, expressive and unambiguous. First and foremost, Esperanto speakers want to be understood, which would be seriously hampered were they to use an innovative, uncommon variety of the language. Every time Esperanto is used in practice (e.g. in journals, on the radio, in Internet forums, and at congresses), its use constitutes a test case of successful communication, the results of which in turn have balancing effects.

Such a classification into factors facilitating language change and those hampering it is not without its drawbacks, as there are also factors that can have both types of influence. Zamenhof’s dual role as linguistic creator and as arbiter of usage is one

of those. An additional factor is the evolution of the speech community itself. This community is, on the one hand, the precondition for the use and further development of the language (and thus for language change), and, on the other, the sum of its speakers – with their identities and attitudes (which act as a conservative force). We will therefore pay special attention to these two aspects in the following sections.

25.3 Zamenhof’s ideas on language change

When Zamenhof published his *Lingvo Internacia* in 1887, Esperanto was not a fully fledged language, but a grammatical outline with a few sample texts and a vocabulary list of only about 900 elements. Zamenhof was convinced that the language must develop through collective use.¹⁷⁸ The language was already capable of serving as a means of (written) communication for the pioneer users, but at the same time it left much room for growth, change, and stabilisation in its grammar, pragmatics, and lexicon as they were deployed by the use of its slowly growing speech community (Schubert, 2010; Tonkin, 2017). However, Zamenhof was also aware that the young and immature language needed to be protected from arbitrary and chaotic changes that might culminate in the emergence of geographical or diachronic varieties. He expressed his concern about the unity of the language in the preface to *Fundamento de Esperanto*, which was established as the immutable part of the basis of Esperanto in 1905 by the first World Esperanto Congress with the *Declaration of Boulogne* (see Chapter 8).

The evolutionary model that Zamenhof outlined for Esperanto in this preface, if fully put into practice and followed by the speakers, would in fact allow for slow and controlled development of the language. It comprises three types of elements (Zamenhof 1991/1905, pp. 33, 37):

Elements from the *Fundamento*, either by explicit appearance (e.g. in the dictionary) or by implicit inclusion (e.g. internationalisms like *buso* ‘bus’), are by definition linguistically correct, stylistically acceptable, and unchangeable. They are “official”.

178. See the following two statements by Zamenhof: “Ĉar la tuta esenco de lingvo estas bazita antaŭ ĉio sur *interkonsento*, tial komuna ĝisnuna uzado devas ludi en lingvo pli gravan rolon, ol seke teoria logikeco; [...]” [As the very essence of a language is above all based on *convention*, the common use up to now has to play a bigger role in a language than dry theoretical logic; (...)] (Zamenhof 1962/1911, *Lingva respondo* 47); “La lingvo internacia devas vivi, kreski kaj progresi laŭ la samaj leĝoj, laŭ kiaj estis ellaborataj ĉiuj vivaj lingvoj.” [The international language has to live, grow, and progress according to the same laws by which all living languages are elaborated] (Zamenhof, 1888/89, pp. 7–8).

New words for concepts that cannot be expressed by roots from the *Fundamento* can be used at will, but are not obligatory. If they become incontestably accepted, a “central authoritative body” (*aŭtoritata centra institucio*), a role which nowadays the Esperanto Academy (*Akademio de Esperanto*) serves, can add them to the dictionary in the *Fundamento* (officialise them), making them part of the immutable base. The same goes for new rules, such as details of word formation or the use of certain participles.

New words for concepts that are synonyms of an official root should not be used. However, when it becomes clear that an official element is “too inconvenient” (*tro neoportuna*) – which is best seen when a non-standard form is used instead of it in spite of the official ban – the Esperanto Academy is entitled to officialise an alternative or at least declare it tolerated. The old form still does not lose its official character (as it is immutable), but the competing new form can now be used and may render the older form archaic.¹⁷⁹

As Zamenhof emphasised, the third case, the officialisation or toleration of new forms for existing official elements, should be an exception reserved for cases of indubitable need for a correction of the basic rules. Indeed, the Esperanto Academy usually waits a few decades, observing the actual use of a form, before it officialises it. And the cases of new forms being sanctioned instead of official forms are still rare.¹⁸⁰

In theory, this evolutionary model would mean a conscious renunciation of a certain array of possible changes, with regard to the basic linguistic system (the morphology) and core vocabulary, which already function well and seem not to need any modification.¹⁸¹ In this way, only “necessary” changes that enhance the expressiveness of the language and do not disturb or devalue its system would be accepted. Nevertheless, it has become clear that there is not only an invisible hand in

179. Examples include *inflamo* (‘inflammation’) instead of *brulumo* (from *brul-* ‘burn’), which became part of the Esperanto lexicon by means of the *Kvara Oficiala Aldono* (‘Fourth Official Addition’).

180. A notable exception is the wide toleration or officialisation of forms with *k* instead of *Fundamento* forms with the rare phoneme *ĥ* (e.g. *kemio* beside *ĥemio* ‘chemistry’). See Chapter 25.4.

181. This of course does not mean that we think that the basics of Esperanto were some kind of ideal or without alternatives. In fact, there is not a single element in the language about which there was, is, or could be no discussion as to whether it could be expressed in another way. What we want to state is that there may be different opinions whether, for example, the direct object should be expressed by a morphological case like *-n* in Esperanto, by a preposition, or by word order as in English, but that from a linguistic point of view there is no way to claim that one of them is objectively “better” or more complete than the other solutions, meaning there is no communicative necessity triggering the change in question.

language change (see footnote 173). There are also no taboo places that are shielded from changes. As a consequence, some of the changes that have since occurred in Esperanto, including uses that are very popular among speakers, contradict the explicit norms of the *Fundamento*. Examples will be shown in Chapter 25.5.

Of course, Zamenhof was not so naïve as to believe that merely prohibiting certain changes would prevent them from happening sooner or later. In a letter published in his *Lingvaj Respondoj* (see footnote 164 in Chapter 24.3) (Zamenhof, 1962/1911, pp. 114/115 [Lingva Respondo no. 144]) he expressed his hope that the mechanisms provided by the adoption of the *Fundamento* would slow down and channel linguistic changes and prevent the language from disintegrating into dialects:

La sola celo, kiun la Fundamento havas, estas nur: gardi la lingvon kontraŭ anarĥio, kontraŭ reformoj arbitraj kaj personaj, kontraŭ danĝera rompad, kontraŭ forĵetado de malnovaj formoj, antaŭ ol la novaj estos sufiĉe elprovitaj kaj tute definitive kaj sendispute akceptitaj. [...] lingvo, kiu devas trarabati al si la vojon ne per ia potenco dekreto, sed per laborado de amasoj, povas disvolviĝi nur per tre singarda vojo de natura evolucio, sed ĝi tuj mortus, se oni volus ĝin disvolvi per kontraŭnatura kaj danĝerega vojo de revolucio (original emphasis).

[The only aim the *Fundamento* has is to keep the language safe from *anarchy*, from *arbitrary* and *individual* reforms, from dangerous ruptures, from dumping old forms before the new forms are sufficiently *tested* and definitively and beyond doubt *accepted*. (...) A language that has to break its way through not by some kind of powerful decree, but by the work of the masses, can evolve only by means of a very careful path of natural evolution. But it would die instantly if you chose to develop it by the unnatural and highly dangerous path of revolution.]¹⁸²

Altogether, there is no denying the fact that Esperanto has gone its way quite successfully from a mere project to a language in active use. Its making, as Gledhill (2014, p. 325) puts it, “was a ‘co-production’, in which the language scheme became a living language through a process of interactive language creation”. The instructions of the *Fundamento* may seem paradoxical – in order for a change to be approved, it has to be tested by use, but at the same time unapproved changes should not be used – but this strategy has obviously proven successful. It is an alternative approach to established linguistic norms, which a language without native speakers particularly needs if it is to retain its stability.

182. For an interpretation of the *Fundamento* from the point of view of linguistic norms, see especially Velger (1994).

25.4 The role of speakers in language change

As, of course, the speakers of the language are the most important element in language change (Blythe & Croft, 2009; Keller, 2003), we should at this juncture recall the competences and attitudes of a typical Esperanto speaker. In Chapter 4 we described Esperanto speakers as interested in languages and mostly polyglot, linguistically loyal and equipped with high degrees of metalinguistic knowledge. This evaluation is confirmed by sociolinguistic studies of the speech community (e.g. Kimura, 2012; Solís, 2012; Stria, 2017). In his questionnaire, Rašić (1994) asked the participants about their views on some of the most frequently discussed language issues in Esperanto, such as the Eurocentric character of the vocabulary, or diacritics. Unsurprisingly, opinions differed considerably, but the most important result was the low percentage of people who did not have an opinion on these questions at all (between 3.85 and 10.26%).¹⁸³ Esperanto speakers are highly interested in linguistic matters and they play an active part in the development of their language.

Discussions on correct language use, on the observance of the basic rules, are of the utmost importance to speakers, who understand that this is the precondition of Esperanto's successful development. Debates on linguistic issues have therefore accompanied the language throughout its history, although the places where they occur have changed, of course. The correspondence between Zamenhof and the early language supporters, along with the collection and publication of his answers (Zamenhof's *Lingvaj Respondoj*) are very early forms of these discussions. In addition to Esperanto journals that have always served as places for linguistic discussions and language guidance (see Chapter 25.5 for examples from 1889 and 1905), language is now debated above all in Internet forums and social networks. An examination of one hundred random questions on the important advice website esperanto.stackexchange.com, providing high-quality answers in English or Esperanto, showed that fifty-one of them concerned the basic rules (e.g. questions of word usage, semantic nuances, correct grammatical constructions). There were twenty-three translation requests (of individual words not found in dictionaries), while nineteen concerned other topics (technical questions on typing the Esperanto diacritics, where to find specific literature, etc.). Only seven questions aim at the "metalevel" (e.g. questions of etymology, reforms, why certain problems were solved in this and not another way). From this we can conclude that Esperanto speakers are not interested in changing or "improving" the language, but accept it as is and want to speak it correctly.

183. We owe the idea of interpreting Rašić's results in this way to Maradan (2021, p. 139).

At the same time, speakers are aware that Esperanto needs further elaboration if it is to be used in various domains, especially in science and technology. Speakers' activities in terminology networks focus on compiling specialist terminology lists and dictionaries. They are an important factor for Esperanto's development, especially in the area of lexis (Maradan, 2021).¹⁸⁴

The Esperanto Academy (*Akademio de Esperanto*) has been mentioned several times in this chapter. We considered it a factor of language change that has balancing effects, and we have seen that Zamenhof attached great importance to it in his preface of the *Fundamento*. Chapter 25.5 will present some examples of its activities, such as officialising new lexical items. In contrast to this, in previous chapters, several linguistic examples suggested that speakers opine that the Academy does not face up to its responsibilities in guiding the development of the language. See, for example, the mocking allusions in (142), (214) and (221). Sherwood (1982, p. 187) states:

There is an Academy of Esperanto, but it has historically played a very minor role in the development of the language. Even in lexical matters the Academy has limited itself to occasional listings of words that have been around for enough decades to seem “official”. Major growth in the lexicon has occurred through decentralized individual suggestions and use.

Maradan (2021, p. 141), although agreeing that the Academy “failed to respond to all of Esperanto speakers’ needs, often losing its leading role as the lexicon in favour of other resources”, points out that “the *Akademio* should not be neglected today”, as in her investigation she finds speakers for whom “it remains an absolute lexical reference”, “a prestigious source that must be obeyed without question”.

The fact that Esperanto speakers are aware of the importance of the norms does not mean that they follow Zamenhof's approach outlined above or are aware of it at all. It seems that the fact that Esperanto has not changed much since 1887 or 1905 is not due to its users' faithfully following the path presented in the foreword to the *Fundamento*, but their reluctance to accept many and profound changes at all (see also Philippe, 1991, pp. 90/91). In our experience, when they encounter a linguistic problem, both beginners and advanced speakers alike usually rely on: grammars (especially Wennergren, 2020) and dictionaries (especially Duc Goninaz, 2002 and www.reta-vortaro.com), which they regard as authoritative; on the opinion of good speakers; and on the frequencies of different alternatives in the text corpus tekstaro.com (see also Maradan, 2021). This approach does not differ much from the way people seek advice in other languages, but of course it does not take into account

184. For a survey of past and present terminology work in Esperanto, see W. Blanke (2008) and (2013).

the special circumstances of a planned language that has no (authoritative) native speakers and at the same time a worldwide user base – which is the very reason why Zamenhof pleaded for a novel approach to linguistic norms.

25.5 Examples of language change in Esperanto

A study of language change addresses the variation of a language over time. Although this book does not pursue a diachronic approach, it seems necessary to address past forms of Esperanto usage here in order to prove that Esperanto has become a living language, which – following Blanke’s approach – includes language change. What follows in the remainder of this chapter is a presentation of examples along the levels of the language system, taking the present language use as we found it in our dataset as a point of departure. We will not be able to provide an in-depth study of language change in Esperanto, but will instead confine ourselves to presenting a number of examples and also take account of previous work on this subject by other authors (see Chapter 25.1).

25.5.1 Phonological changes

As already mentioned, Esperanto began as a written language. To a certain extent, the very existence of spoken Esperanto can therefore be considered a result of its evolution. When we listen to historical audio recordings, such as Zamenhof’s speech at the first World Esperanto Congress in 1905¹⁸⁵ or Ivo Lapenna’s speech from 1954,¹⁸⁶ we are astonished by how stable the pronunciation of Esperanto is, as we find no differences with today’s Esperanto. Given the small number of these audio recordings and their restriction to the formal language used on official occasions, it is nevertheless not possible to conduct a detailed comparison.

A morphophonological change that is particularly apparent when we read an Esperanto text from the early days, is the frequent use of the contracted form of the definite article, *l’*, before a word beginning with a vowel and with some prepositions ending in vowels. The *Fundamento* prescribes in rule 16 that “[t]he *a* of the article, and final *o* of substantives, may be sometimes dropped euphoniae gratia, e.g. *de l’mondo* for *de la mondo*; *ŝiller’* for *ŝillerò*; in such cases an apostrophe should be substituted for the discarded vowel” (p. 61). A glance at an Esperanto journal from 1905 reveals that speakers made considerable use of apostrophes to form the definite article:

185. See <https://youtu.be/VT3Z0hVfW44?t=177>.

186. See Minnaja (ed.) (2001).

Pli ol sesdek esperantistoj respondis je l' alvoko de l' komitatoj. Antaŭ la dekunua horo gaja tintado de tintiloj anoncas l' alvenon de l' Provins'a grupo komforte lokita en veturilego. En nubo de polvo kaj en blindiga brileco de tro kompleza suno, la graciaj sinjorinoj kaj la plaĉaj fraŭlinoj, tute griz-pudritaj, desaltas malpeze sur la teron. Atendante la ceterajn grupojn, la ĝoja bando sin dissemas tra la herbejoj inter la lekantoj kaj la ranunkoloj. Vera festo de l' naturo kaj de l' printempo.

(*Esperanto* 2/1905, p. 1)¹⁸⁷

In the early days, speakers were obviously insecure about the use of *l'*. We find an article in the journal *La Esperantisto* (Nuremberg) (3/1889, 20th Dec, p. 24 "Respondoj al la amiko") ['Answers to friends'] in which Zamenhof gives recommendations about its use, answering a reader's letter:

Ĉu vi jam komencis la presadon de Via lernolibro? Se vi ne scias, kiam Vi devas uzi la formon „la” kaj „l'”, uzu ĉiam pli bone la formon „la”. La formon „l'” mi uzas ordinaro nur post prepozicioj, kiuj finiĝas per vokalo (ekzemple „de”, „tra” k.c.); en ĉiaj aliaj okazoj mi uzas ordinaro la plenan formon „la”, ĉar alie la senco povus fariĝi ne klara, en la sono ne agrabla. Z-f.

[Have you already started printing your textbook? If you don't know when you have to use the forms "la" and "l'", it is always better to use the form "la". I commonly use the form "l'" only after prepositions which end in a vowel (e.g. *de*, *tra* and others); in all other cases, I commonly use the full form "la", as otherwise the sense could be unclear, in the sound not pleasant. Z-f]

The frequent use of *l'* was typical of the first decades of Esperanto only (see Figure 21). In the journal *Esperanto* (published by the Universal Esperanto Association) we find eighty-one occurrences per 10,000 words in 1905, compared to just thirty-nine occurrences per 10,000 words in the same journal in 1921. In the 2015 edition of the journal, the use of *l'* is mainly restricted to book titles (e.g. *Perlo de l' Oriento* 'Pearl of the Orient', *Kanto de l' Korvo* 'Song of the Crow').

Another change has been observed concerning *ĥ*, which is the rarest letter in the Esperanto alphabet (Quasthoff et al., 2014, p. 19). Words from the *Fundamento* which contain this letter are often spelled with the letter *k* instead (e.g. *kemio* instead of *ĥemio* 'chemistry', *arkaika* instead of *arĥaika* 'archaic', etc.). The word *tekniko* is among the most frequent 10,000 words, in frequency class 11, according to Quasthoff et al. (2014), whereas *teĥniko* is used far less frequently (frequency class 14). These forms were officialised by the *Akademio de Esperanto*. This change,

187. [(From a report on an Esperanto meeting) 'More than sixty Esperantists responded to the call of the committee. Before 11 o'clock, a happy jingling of bells announces the arrival of the group from Provins comfortably located in a huge vehicle. In a cloud of dust and the dazzling brilliance of the too kind sun, the graceful ladies and pleasant unmarried women, completely covered in grey powder, jump lightly to the ground. Waiting for the other groups, the happy group scatters through the meadows among marguerites and buttercups. A real feast of nature and spring!']

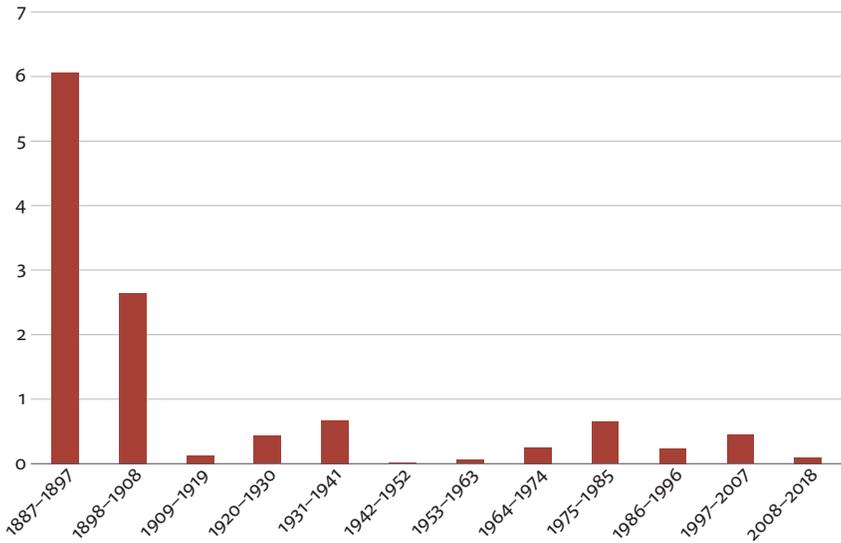


Figure 21. The use of *l* in the texts of *Tekstaro* in various decades

however, is not complete (and may even have passed its apogee), as there are still no official alternatives to *ĥolero* ‘cholera’ (as there is a word *kolero*, which means ‘anger’) and *ĥoro* ‘choir’ (*koro* means ‘heart’). Of course, the speech community does employ synonyms (*kolerao* and *koruso*), but these are generally regarded as non-standard as they have not been officialised by the Academy.¹⁸⁸ Many speakers are not actually aware of this limitation, as the forms are quite common.

25.5.2 Orthographic changes

The introduction and use of the popular *x*-convention as an alternative to the Esperanto diacritics (see footnote 45 in Chapter 11) can be considered a change in the area of spelling. Frequency studies show that Zamenhof’s alternative writing system (the *h*-convention) is preferred by Esperanto speakers. As a rule, *h* spellings (e.g. *ghin* and *chu* instead of *ĝin* and *ĉu*) belong to a higher frequency class than *x* spellings (*gxin* and *cxu*) (for a detailed description, see Quasthoff et al., 2014, pp. 10f.).

From a normative point of view, the *x*-convention is sub-standard, as the section on the alphabet in the *Fundamento* prescribes the *h*-convention for cases in which the accented letters cannot be used. The *x*-convention, however, can be accepted as a (superior) technical surrogate for purposes of printed publication.

188. See the question to and answer by the *Akademio de Esperanto*: http://akademio.info/akademio/index.php?title=Respondoj_de_la_Lingva_Konsultejo#Pri_27k.27_kaj_27.C4.A5.27.

25.5.3 Lexical changes

The Esperanto lexicon has undergone enormous expansion. As Tonkin (2015, p. 196) has stated, “the vast majority of the vocabulary has been created by the speakers of the language rather than its originator”. The lexical expansion of Esperanto can be documented by comparing Esperanto dictionaries (see Table 15).

Table 15. Size of selected Esperanto dictionaries

Year of publication	Name of publication	Number of roots/entries
1887	<i>Unua Libro</i>	< 1,000 roots
1894	<i>Universala Vortaro</i>	approx. 2,600 roots
1934	<i>Plena Vortaro</i> (Grossjean-Maupin et al., second edition)	6,900 roots + 5,000 compounds
1970	<i>Plena Ilustrita Vortaro</i> (Waringhien)	approx. 15,250 roots (about 45,000 entries including compounds and derivations)
2002	<i>La Nova Plena Ilustrita Vortaro</i>	approx. 17,000 roots (about 47,000 entries)

The language has to keep pace with the changing world. Scientific and technological innovations as well as social developments are reflected in Esperanto as in all other languages. Expressions such as *saĝtelefono* (‘smartphone’), *sendrata reto/vifio* (‘wifi’) and *kronviruso/koronviruso* (‘coronavirus’) bear witness to these developments. Also, historical developments among the Esperanto speech community have led to lexical expansion, as shown by *kabei*,¹⁸⁹ *raŭmisto* (see Chapter 8) and the phraseological expressions presented in Chapter 21. Many new expressions have their origin in specialist fields (medicine, computer sciences, politics) and enter general language use to differing degrees. As mentioned in Chapter 23, there are also neologisms coined on the basis of new roots (e.g. *olda* [‘old’], *primavero* [‘spring’]), whose use is however mainly limited to instances of poetic licence.

The two principal means of lexical expansion were described in Chapter 11. The very fact that the *Fundamento* includes these possibilities is indicative of Zamenhof’s vision and conviction that Esperanto would continue to evolve. The lexical development is both a result of the speakers’ productive application of Esperanto’s affix system (see, for example, the long list of word formations with the root *amik-* in Chapter 11 and the creative employment of word formation principles for humorous purposes in Chapter 20) and borrowing. As for the latter strategy, at present, languages are especially influenced by English (Furiassi et al., 2012). The

189. “To disappear from the Esperanto movement” – from Kabe (pseudonym of Kazimierz Bein), an early Esperanto stylist who became discouraged with the Esperanto movement and abruptly abandoned it.

English language is nowadays an important donor language for Esperanto as well, as examples such as *podkasto* and *blogo* illustrate. As regards those direct borrowings from other languages, we should consider two things. First, Esperanto itself is an a posteriori language with a mixed vocabulary (see Chapter 7) and, secondly, it is an autonomous system (with, for example, word category markers and high degrees of agreement between spelling and pronunciation). Imports from other languages have to undergo various form adaptations to be used in Esperanto, so that words such as *podkasto* and *blogo* are not felt as foreign. They are in agreement with Esperanto's word formation principles and do not differ very much from words such as *birdo* ('bird') or *kisi* ('to kiss'), which are of English origin as well, but part of Esperanto's basic vocabulary included in the *Fundamento*. As a consequence, they do not pose pronunciation or spelling problems for speakers, as is often the case with Anglicisms entering ethnic languages.

Nevertheless, as shown in Chapter 22, speakers of Esperanto are more hesitant to borrow from English than speakers of other languages (see also Fiedler, 2018a). A closer look at IT terminology, a domain that is closely associated with fast lexical innovation, can be revealing in this context. Table 16 shows that a large stock of very frequent terms from this domain has been formed endogenously in Esperanto, which makes them immediately comprehensible, even for the average Esperanto speaker. Other languages, e.g. German, include many direct loans from English. These show only minor assimilations, such as in spelling (capitalisation of nouns) and phonology (cf. *mail* in English [meɪl] and German [meɪl]). In addition, pseudo-English terms (false Anglicisms) (e.g. *Handy* and *Beamer* in German) are created because of the image improvement that English vocabulary brings about in other national languages.

Table 16. IT terminology in English, German and Esperanto (see Nevelsteen, 2012)

English	German	Esperanto
<i>provider</i>	<i>Provider</i>	<i>provizanto</i> (from <i>proviz-</i> 'provide' and <i>-ant</i> active participle)
<i>software</i>	<i>Software</i>	<i>programaro</i> (from <i>program-</i> 'program' and <i>-ar</i> 'set')
<i>email</i>	<i>E-Mail</i>	<i>retpoŝto/retmesaĝo</i> (from <i>ret-</i> 'net' and <i>poŝt-</i> 'mail' / <i>mesaĝ-</i> 'message')
<i>cell phone / mobile phone</i>	<i>Handy</i>	<i>poŝtelefono</i> (from <i>poŝ-</i> 'pocket' and <i>telefon-</i> 'telephone')
<i>browser</i>	<i>Browser</i>	<i>retumilo/foliumilo/TTT-legilo</i> (from <i>ret-</i> 'net', <i>-um</i> [suffix with no fixed meaning], <i>foli-</i> 'sheet', <i>-il</i> 'instrument', <i>TutTeraTeksajo</i> 'World Wide Web', <i>leg-</i> 'read')
<i>chat room</i>	<i>Chatroom</i>	<i>retbabilejo</i> (from <i>ret-</i> 'net', <i>babil-</i> 'chat' and <i>-ej</i> 'place')
<i>mailing list</i>	<i>Mailingliste</i>	<i>dissendolisto</i> (<i>dis-</i> [prefix denoting dispersal], <i>send-</i> 'send' and <i>list-</i> 'list')
<i>server</i>	<i>Server</i>	<i>servilo</i> (from <i>serv-</i> 'serve' and <i>-il</i> 'instrument')
<i>video projector</i>	<i>Beamer</i>	<i>projekciilo</i> (from <i>projekci-</i> 'project [an image]' and <i>-il</i> 'instrument')

Lexical change also includes the loss of words, as shown with some phraseological units in Chapter 21, and the substitution of old units with new ones. It can be interesting to track the pace of changes that individual words pass through, as far as the limited size and composition of Esperanto corpora enable us to do so.¹⁹⁰ The word *vagonaro* (‘train’, lit. ‘a collection/set of wagons’) is an example of an expression that seems to be passing out of current use. It has been replaced by *trajno*. It was widely used by Zamenhof and other Esperanto pioneers.¹⁹¹ The collection of Esperanto journals for the period 1892 to 1902 includes fourteen occurrences (in two different journals with a total of 1,474 pages), while there are no hits for the word *trajno* during that period. The innovation was made the topic of linguistic discussion in an article in *Esperanto* (No. 11, 1918) that proposed the use of *trajno*:

Lingvaj Studoj

Vortaro

16 Trajno (*vagonaro*)

En la ĉefaj lingvoj ekzistas mallonga esprimo por tio, kion Esp. nomas vagonaro (A. train, F. train, G. Zug, H. tren, I. treno.). Ĉu ne konvenus rilate al tio imiti la naciajn lingvojn kaj elekti por tiu ofte uzata vorto malpli pezan esprimon ol nia vagonaro? En nia lingvo ekzistas la radiko tren-i kun la senco posttiri; laŭ la derivreguloj de Esp., treno estas rezulto de l' ago tren' kaj sekve ne povas esti uzata por "vagonaro". Se oni aliparte elektus kiel patrovorton treno, la verbo treni ne plu povus esti logike uzata kun sia ĝisnuna senco. (Ekz. ĉevaloj trenas ĉaron, robo havas trenaĵon, tute sen bezono de "vagonaro"). Sendependa radiko estas do preferinda, ĉar pli logika. Proponinda estas trajno, kiu memorigas al la angla kaj franca ortografioj. El trajno la jenaj vortoj estus devenigeblaj: trajnejo, trajnisto, trajnestro, trajnego, entrajniĝi, eltrajniĝi, trajnveturi, k.a. kiuj estas pli koncizaj ol la vortoj devenigeblaj el vagonaro.

[Language Studies

Vocabulary

16 Trajno (*vagonaro*)

In the major languages there is a short expression for what Esperanto denotes *vagonaro* (English *train*, French *train*, German *Zug*, Spanish *tren*, Italian *treno*). Wouldn't it be appropriate with regard to this to imitate the national languages and choose for this frequently used word a less heavy expression than our *vagonaro*? In our language a root *tren-i* exists meaning 'tow/draw'; according to Esperanto's

190. For the following analysis we used two sources: the Esperanto corpus *Tekstaro* (www.Tekstaro.com) and the collection of Esperanto journals until 1940 provided by the Austrian State Library (see Chapter 21). The latter source does not provide information on the number of words.

191. In the journal *Esperanto* (6 August 1905, original emphasis), in a report on the first World Esperanto Congress we read, for example, "ĉe la dua ekskurso en Wimereux per speciala vagonaro" [on the second [day] excursion in Wimeraux by a special train].

rules of derivation, *treno* is the result of the action *tren-* and, hence cannot be used for *vagonaro*. If one chose *treno* as the starting point / basic word on the other hand, the verb *treni* could not be used logically in its present sense any more (e.g. *horses draw a cart, a dress has a train*, completely without need of *vagonaro*). An independent root is therefore to be preferred as it is more logical. It is worth recommending *trajno*, which recalls the English and French spellings. From *trajno*, the following words might be formed: *trajnejo* (train depot), *trajnist* (conductor), *trajnestro* (train manager), *trajnego* (long train), *entrajniĝi* (get on a train), *eltrajniĝi* (get off a train), etc., which are more concise than the words which can be formed from *vagonaro*.]

In the period 1937 to 1940, there are 107 hits for *vagonaro* and forty-nine hits for *trajno* (in nine different journals with 1,740 pages). The corpus *Tekstaro* (version consulted in June 2019), which includes two modern Esperanto journals, *Monato* (1997–2003, 2012–2018) and *La Ondo de Esperanto* (2001–2004) as well as the Esperanto version of *Le Monde diplomatique* (2002–2019) (forming a sub-corpus of 5,459,620 words), suggests that the lexical change has advanced further, leading to the extensive adoption of the new linguistic form: we find 259 occurrences of *trajno* and forty of *vagonaro*.

This example parallels what we know about language change in ethnic languages. First, we can distinguish between innovation, i.e. the creation of a novel form, and propagation of that form as two components of the process of linguistic change (Croft, 2000). The diffusion of *trajno* (and, similarly, of *rezulto* – see Figure 22 below) through the speech community has been a gradual process that has taken time. Secondly, as we see in the forty remaining occurrences of *vagonaro* in the corpus used, the process may never be complete – the old form may never be fully replaced.¹⁹² Thirdly, as is often the case with synonymous expressions that compete with each other over time, one of the alternative forms is eventually used for a more specific sense. Thus railway terminology now defines *vagonaro* as “*tutaĵo de vagonoj de trajno*” (totality of wagons of a train [not including the locomotive]) (Hoffmann, 2000, p. 8).

Other words have changed their forms, such as *proleto* (formerly *proletario*) (Blanke, 2010, p. 66) or *rezulto* (*rezultato* in Esperanto’s early days). Figure 22 shows the change of the word *rezultato* into *rezulto*.¹⁹³ While in 1900 *rezultato* is the only form found in Esperanto journals, it still predominates in 1910 and 1920. Its use

192. A close look at the uses of *vagonaro* included in *Tekstaro* reveals the influence of individual speakers on Esperanto: more than half of the forty occurrences can be traced back to the frequent use of the word in two short stories by the same author published in the monthly *Monato*.

193. See footnote 190.

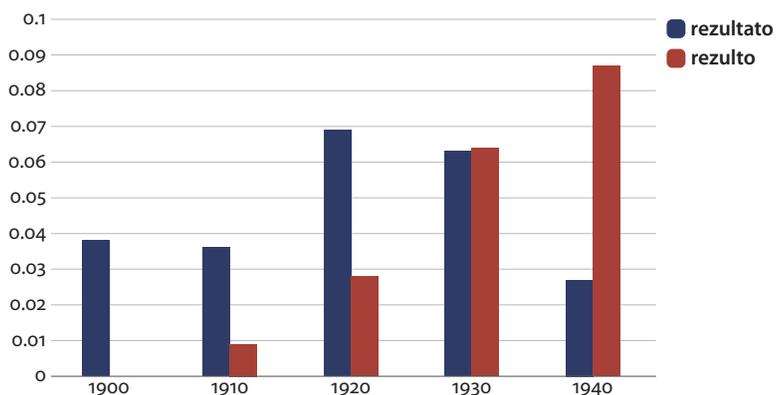


Figure 22. The use of *rezultato* and *rezulto* in Esperanto journals (1900–1940) (occurrences per printed page)

starts decreasing and competing with *rezulto* after 1920. Occasionally, both forms occur in the same journal, as in *Esperanto* (No. 1, 1921), which includes seven uses of *rezultato* and eight of *rezulto*. While the uses of the two forms almost levelled out in 1930, *rezulto* clearly predominates in 1940. The corpus *Tekstaro* provides 131 hits for *rezultato* (all of them before the year 1958) and 708 hits for *rezulto*.

The new words (*rezulto*, *proleto*, *meteologio*, etc.) are shorter than those they replace (*rezultato*, *proletario*, *meteorologio*, etc.), which confirms the importance of the factor of economy. Blanke (2010) emphasises phonetic aspects (facilitation of articulation) as a motivation for these changes.

As changes in language and vocabulary document societal changes, it is hardly surprising that especially in recent decades speakers have criticised one of Esperanto's flaws: its violation of gender-neutrality. The third person singular pronouns *li* 'he' and *ŝi* 'she' compulsorily distinguish the gender of (adult) persons, but *li* is also used to refer to persons of unknown sex or gender. A small but frequent set of roots mostly for parental and nobility terms (e.g. *patr*' father', *reĝ*' king', *knab*' boy') are inherently male (with the female forms *patrino* 'mother', *reĝino* 'queen', *knabino* 'girl' etc.). This situation has been criticised for two reasons: from a symbolic point of view, it is unacceptable for many people today to see the man as the unmarked base, from which marked expressions for women are derived or where women are not included at all. From a communicative point of view, it is also disadvantageous that there is on the one hand no easy way to avoid the expression of gender when roots indicating sex are used (e.g. for the formulation of general rules like "every child must be accompanied by a parent"), and on the other hand the forms without female *-in* are notoriously ambiguous: *najbarino* is a female neighbour, but does *najbaro* mean any neighbour or only a male one?

To avoid sexist pronouns, speakers apply various combinations of *li* and *ŝi* (e.g. *ŝi/li*, *ŝi aŭ li*, *li aŭ ŝi*, *li/ŝi*), which is also evident in our dataset:

- (387) [...] *kiam mi aŭskultas ion en Esperanto, kaj la parolanto havas fortan akĉenton, estas malfacile kompreni lin aŭ ŝin komence* [...] [(...) when I listen to something in Esperanto and the speaker has a strong accent, it's difficult to understand him or her at the beginning (...)] [210 (eng; written int; -) 91–93]
- (388) *Helpu la najbaron aŭ la najbarinon, se ŝi aŭ li havas problemon* [Help your (male/female) neighbour if she or he has a problem] [130 (fra; tour; Lille-Arras) 1:07]

Double forms like this (or *patro aŭ patrino* ‘father or mother = a parent’), however, do not solve another problem that has recently become urgent: non-binary people, who do not identify with either of the two traditional sex-based genders (see Richards et al., 2017). A linguistic system based on a binary distinction and expressing only these two genders makes it hard to speak about or refer to non-binary people. In response, in recent years there have been several proposals for reforms that would enable Esperanto to refer to all genders or to no gender at all. A male suffix *-iĉ* (symmetrical to *-in*, for non-binaries recently *-ip*, has come into limited use), and a new pronoun *ri* – either as gender-neutral or especially for non-binary persons – has become popular especially among young and progressive speakers in the very recent past.¹⁹⁴ Also, new gender-neutral words like *parento* and *gepatro* ‘parent’ have recently been registered. Our dataset, however, hardly contains any of these innovative elements, with the exception of metalinguistic uses in discussions about sexist language use.

- (389) [...] *ĉar vi ne povas tute ekscii eĉ de ies aspekto kian ĝenron ri havas* [because you can't tell at all even from somebody's appearance what **their** gender is] [11 (eng; disc; Poznań) 11:55]
- (390) *Tio estas kvazaŭ la problemo kun patro kaj patrino. Kial estu la bazaj formoj tiu iĉo kaj ino?* [This is, as it were, the problem with *patro* and *patrino*. Why should the basic forms be *iĉo* and *ino*?] [12 (eng; disc; Poznań) 20:19]

The coming decades will show whether these innovations become part of the language. For more detailed information, see Brosch (2015a), Fiedler (2015c), Cramer (2014, 2021), and Cramer et al. (2019).

194. Male suffixes, new pronouns (*ri* dates from 1981), and gender-neutral roots had been proposed before from time to time without further echo. What makes a difference and could be the beginning of real and profound language change is the fact that now these proposals are in actual use, although they must still be seen as experimental and non-standard.

25.5.4 Semantic changes

As described in previous chapters, Esperanto has a rich affix system that allows its speakers to be flexible and productive in coining new words, resulting in a word stock of lexical items that are both expressive and transparent. As Esperanto is a living language, its vocabulary cannot escape lexicalisation. Koutny (2015) shows how the word *vortaro* (from *vort-* [‘word’], *-ar* [‘group, set’] and *-o* [noun]) is not a noun meaning simply “group of words”, but is associated with the specific concept of ‘dictionary’. By contrast, a similar formation – *libraro* (from *libro* [‘book’], *-ar* [‘group, set’] and *-o* [noun]) – has not been lexicalised, but can be understood as either book collection, library or bookshop, as the author found in a survey. See also Chapter 11, where we used *lernejo* [‘school’] and *homaro* [‘mankind’] as examples of lexicalised word formations. That lexicalisation bears a relationship with frequency can be seen from the fact that lexicalised word formations are among the most frequent words in Esperanto (*lernejo* and *homaro* are in the top ten per cent of word frequency – see Quasthoff et al., 2014).

Semantic change has also brought more frequent instances of polysemy. In Zamenhof’s initial word list one lexeme was attributed to one meaning, but today, as a result of Esperanto’s growing use in various domains, lexemes are used with several related meanings. Blanke (2010, p. 71) illustrates this by comparing entries in a 1910 dictionary (Kabe, 1910) with those in the present standard dictionary (Duc Goninaz et al., 2002).

However, there are also examples of polysemous words in Esperanto whose meaning has narrowed to one specific use. Examples are *humoro*, which originally referred (1) to a person’s mood or temperament and (2) to wit. Its use is now restricted to the first meaning, whereas *humuro* expresses the second sense. Analogously, *proceso* was used for both general ideas (‘process’, ‘sequence of phenomena’ or ‘course’) and legal contexts (‘trial’) in the 1930s (Grosjean-Maupin, 1934, p. 386). Its use is now limited to the latter meaning, whereas *procezo* is used in the former. The word *procedo* (from *procedi* ‘proceed’) is used to designate a method or way of achieving a goal.

As for individual lexical items, Piron (1989a) describes how the verb *ami* has experienced a shift in its semantic field. It was originally used for expressing both romantic feelings and simple ideas or tastes such as *Mi amas kanti* (‘I like to sing’), as do *aimer* in French and *любить* in Russian, which are used to express both ‘to love’ and ‘to like’. This apparently double meaning was hard to accept for speakers of non-Russian and non-French origin, who restricted the use of *ami* to the semantic field of ‘to love’ and used *ŝati* for the concept ‘to like’, as is the case in Esperanto today. The verb *ŝati* originally meant to ‘appreciate’: the *Fundamento* offers as translations *estimer* (French), *esteem* (English), *viel halten, großen Wert legen* (German),

дорожить (Russian), and *cenić, oleniać, szacować* (Polish) (Zamenhof, 1991/1905, p. 214). Its change in meaning to cover the concept ‘to like’ made it necessary to create a new word, *apreci/aprezi*, to cover the original meaning of the verb *ŝati* (Wood, 1979).

Lindstedt (2016) mentions the verb *klopodi* as a similar example of semantic change. Its original meaning ‘to worry about sth.’ (Zamenhof, 1991/1905, p. 178) has shifted towards ‘to try/endeavour’. In this way, Lindstedt (2016, p. 255) argues, the words *ŝati* and *klopodi* have “freed themselves from the chains of their original etymons” (*liberiĝis de la katenoj de siaj originaj etimoj*: the German *schätzen* and Yiddish *shatsn* and the Polish *kłopotać się* and Russian *хлопотать* respectively), so that their use with a following infinitive, as in Examples (391) to (394) in our dataset, represents normal modern Esperanto.

- (391) *Parolante pri [...] iniciatoj, mi ŝatus aldoni ankaŭ alian temon kiu ne estis ankoraŭ menciita [...]*
 [Talking about (...) initiatives, I would like to add another topic, too, that has not yet been mentioned (...)] [144 (ita; pres/disc; Lille) 43:40]
- (392) *Mi ŝatas diri, ke ne nur estas OPINIOJ ĉu estas seksismo en Esperanto aŭ NE [...]* [I like to say that there are not only opinions whether there is sexism in Esperanto or NOT (...)] [11 (deu; disc; Poznań) 48:47]
- (393) *Sed, miaopinie, prononci Esperanton laŭ naciaj akĉentoj estas tute erara praktiko. Ĉiuj esperantistoj devus klopodi respekti la prononcon indikitan en la Fundamento de Esperanto. [...]*
 [But in my opinion, it’s an utterly wrong practice to pronounce Esperanto according to national accents. All Esperanto speakers should try hard to respect the pronunciation indicated in the *Fundamento de Esperanto*. (...)] (W22)
- (394) *Kion oni povas kaj devas fari estas klopodi prononci kiel eble plej malrapide kaj precipe kiel eble plej klare.*
 [What one can do and has to do is try hard to pronounce as slowly and especially as clearly as possible.] (W23)

Another interesting example is the pair *okazo* (‘case, occasion’) and *kazo* (‘case’), which reflects the distinction between *случай* and *надеж* in Russian (Piron, 1989a, p. 130; Lindstedt, 2009, p. 129), with the result that in the early years *kazo* was used only in the sense of ‘declension case’, whereas *okazo* was used for most other meanings.¹⁹⁵ Because in Western languages, such as French and English, terms like *cas* and *case* are used in a much wider sense, the meaning of *kazo* in Esperanto has changed accordingly, which is why uses such as those in (211) and (359) are

195. See, for example, Zamenhof’s “en ĉiaj aliaj okazoj” in Chapter 25.5.1.

accepted by many speakers today. This development has recently occupied the *Akademio de Esperanto*,¹⁹⁶ although it has thus far failed to reach an agreement that might lead to recommendations for the speech community.

Our pilot study in Chapter 21.6 on the evolution of Esperanto phraseology showed that internal language changes are not restricted to simple and complex words. There are also phraseological units that are no longer common today, and new expressions are coined. Thus, within such a relatively short period of existence of about 130 years, it is indeed possible to observe significant semantic change, as our analysis of *fosi sian sulkon* illustrated.

25.5.5 Morphological changes

Piron (1989a) also describes several changes in the area of morphology, such as speakers' inclination to use non-verbal morphemes verbally (e.g. *la lago bluas* 'the lake is blue', lit. 'it blues') and affixes and prepositions autonomously as words, as in the following examples from our dataset:¹⁹⁷

- (395) *Pardonu. Ĉio enordas. Ĉio bonas.*
[Sorry. Everything is OK. Everything is fine.] [149 (hun; pres; Lille) 10:50]
- (396) *Resume, internacie organizita eksperimento kaj ties rezultoj bonas en tiuj ŝtatoj.*
[In sum, internationally organised experiments and their results are good in these states.] [198 (hun; pres; Lisbon) 31:45]
- (397) *Fakte, ĉu ne, tiu esplorado havas la du direktojn: ene elen kaj ele enen, kvankam estas interfluo, ni povas diri.* [In fact, actually, this research has the two directions: from inside to outside and from outside to inside, although there are interminglings, one might say.] [143 (eng; pres/disc; Lille) 84: 37–52]

When we take the Esperanto corpus *Tekstaro* as a basis, we find first uses of forms like *bonas* in the middle of the 1980s, although some Esperanto pioneers made use of them much earlier (see, for example, A. Grabowski's translation of *Pan Tadeusz* in 1918).

In a similar vein, there are isolated first uses of *ene* and *enen* in Szathmári's *Satiraj rakontoj* (1950–1969) and Valano's *Ĉu*-novels (see footnote 124), while they are frequent in present-day Esperanto journals (*Monato*, *La Ondo de Esperanto*, *Le*

196. See the documentation of their debates on it at: <https://lingvakritiko.com/2014/10/23/okazo-kaj-kazo/> and <https://lingvakritiko.com/2016/01/14/la-kazo-de-kazo/>. See also Pokrovskij (2014) and Cramer (2016).

197. See the love letter in (165) (Chapter 20), in which this principle was deliberately overused for humorous purposes.

Monde Diplomatique en Esperanto) (in total almost 800 occurrences), supporting our general observation that forms such as *pere de* and *ene de* (instead of *per* and *en*) are examples of language change in Esperanto.

25.5.6 Grammatical changes

We will exemplify this type of language change using the complex verb form *-intus*, as in the following examples from our dataset (see also Example (187)).

- (398) *Krome li rakontis: Mi povintus (limigi) min al la nura uzo de Esperanto, sed mi volis ankaŭ engaĝiĝi por la ideo.*

[Furthermore, he said: I would have been able to limit myself to using Esperanto only, but I wanted to commit myself to the idea too.]

[191 (deu; pres; Lisbon) 16:53]

- (399) *[...] oni povas kontribui. Oni povintus ekzemple raporti pri la vizito de la Papo ĉi tie. Bona afero.*

[...] it is possible to contribute. For example, you could have reported on the Pope's visit to this place. A good thing.] [178 (deu; pres; Havana) 44:01]

As described in Chapter 11, Esperanto grammar includes compound tenses, e.g. *mi estis leginta* ('I had read'). Some speakers like to contract the periphrastic constructions (*mi legintis*). Verb forms ending in *-us* used to express irreal situations (e.g. *mi legus* 'I would read') do not have temporal value. Nevertheless, many speakers associate them with the present time and choose to use *-intus* when they refer to an irreal situation in the past (see Wennergren, 2020, Chapter 28.4.3). In recent decades, *-intus* constructions have become popular, and *Tekstaro* includes the first uses in the 1950s. The most frequent verbs seem to be *estintus* ('would have been'), *mortintus* ('would have died') (frequency class 14) and *povintus* ('would have been able') (frequency class 15) (see Quasthoff et al., 2014).

25.6 Some concluding remarks on language change in Esperanto

This short study on language change in Esperanto is preliminary. Nevertheless, the examples of structural change presented suffice to demonstrate that assumptions of "the sanguine resistance to change" as "one of the most flawed and 'flaw-retaining' principles of the language invention movement" (Jones & Singh, 2005, p. 182) do not stand up to scientific scrutiny. At the very least, they cannot be attributed to Esperanto. The language evolves because it has been adopted by its speakers, who adapt its system according to their needs. One might even argue that language

change is part of Esperanto's foundations: rules 11 and 15 of the *Fundamento* describe the methods of lexical expansion, and the rich inventory of affixes and regulations about their autonomous use as words invite speakers to be productive and creative. Language change is encouraged by the fact that Zamenhof initiated the language in the form of a grammatical framework, without regulating every single detail – and also the fact that he never did consider it a “perfect” language (see Chapter 8).

It was already predicted by Ferdinand de Saussure in 1916 that the planned language would change. The language was already in active use by then, and the phenomenon of planned (or artificial) languages at the centre of linguistic discussions. De Saussure would have been well aware of Esperanto, as his brother René was an eminent esperantologist (see Chapter 3) (Anderson & L. de Saussure, 2018). De Saussure (1966/1916, p. 75) wrote:

Mutability is so inescapable that it even holds true for artificial languages. Whoever creates a language controls it only so long as it is not in circulation; from the moment when it fulfils its mission and becomes the property of everyone, control is lost. Take Esperanto as an example; if it succeeds, will it escape the inexorable law? Once launched, it is quite likely that Esperanto will enter upon a fully semiological life; it will be transmitted according to laws which have nothing in common with those of its logical creation, and there will be no turning backwards. A man proposing a fixed language that posterity would have to accept for what it is would be like a hen hatching a duck's egg: the language created by him would be borne along, willy-nilly, by the current that engulfs all languages.

As we know today, after more than 130 years of Esperanto language use, de Saussure was right, in principle, prognosticating that even a consciously created language would undergo processes of language change; but the changes are not as drastic as his comparison of “a hen hatching a duck's egg” implies. The language has become the property of a large group of people, but control has not been lost. Esperanto is spoken by a speech community that safeguards its development on the basis of stable but augmentable rules, which is why there are no apparent systematic differences between texts from, say, 1890, 1950, and 2010. Neither has Esperanto split into dialects as occasionally predicted (see Brugmann & Leskien, 1907, pp. 23–26 for an early example of this opinion). The instances of language change that we have described can therefore be regarded as signs of Esperanto's successful use.

The examples shown in this chapter, especially the changes in vocabulary (which is the field where language change manifests itself most visibly and speedily: Aitchison, 2012, p. 12; Munske, 2015, p. 20), and including the semantic changes that individual words have undergone, have shown that language change in Esperanto is closely related to the impact that ethnic languages, i.e. the speakers'

mother tongues, exercise on the planned language itself. This topic has been the subject of very little research (for some exceptions, see Fiedler, 1999, pp. 335–338; Golden, 1994; Korjenkov, 1994/95). Its investigation is difficult because of Esperanto's a posteriori character. As Esperanto was “born” from ethnic languages and remained under their influence from the very beginning, we cannot draw a line between its original and its acquired characteristics. All we can do is describe the changes that started to occur after 1905 (first World Esperanto Congress, enactment of Zamenhof's *Fundamento* as an immutable linguistic norm). Research is further complicated by the fact that currently many Esperanto-related activities take place online and with ever-shrinking traditional organisations, which makes it hard to assess the geographical distribution of speakers. An in-depth investigation of the influences of other languages on Esperanto is a desideratum and especially worthwhile against the backdrop of Esperanto's increasing use in Asia and Africa.

