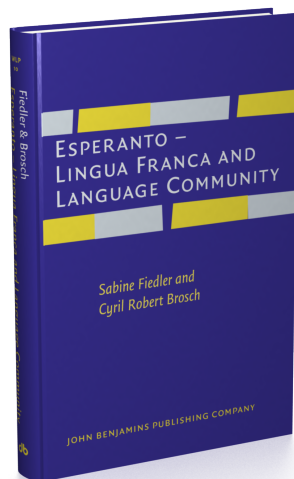


Esperanto as a corporate language

A case study of an educational NGO

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26.1 Introduction

The use of Esperanto in a professional context is restricted to several international Esperanto organisations, for example the Universal Esperanto Association UEA. The international staff at its headquarters in Rotterdam naturally use Esperanto as their corporate language. In addition, there are several independent Esperanto publishers, travel agencies and other small companies that offer their services in various languages including Esperanto (for a survey see Chrdele, 2013), but, in these cases, the scope of communication is insufficiently broad and differentiated for an ethnographic study. The institution that serves as a basis for this study is an obvious exception. We attach great importance to including the use of Esperanto for professional purposes in our investigation in this book. The workplace setting can, on the one hand, serve the purpose of summarising and, to a certain extent, testing the results we have gained so far about the characteristics of how the planned language is used; on the other hand, there are a number of new insights to be expected in a situation in which the use of Esperanto is not solely a recreational activity.

26.2 Participants and methods

The basis for this study is E@I, which stands for Education@Internet, an international youth non-profit organisation dating back to 1999 and registered as an NGO in 2005 in Slovakia. It aims to support intercultural learning and the use of languages and Internet technologies by means of educational projects. While some of the projects run by the organisation are aimed at the use and dissemination of Esperanto (such as the organisation of Esperanto conferences and seminars, and online collections of songs and recipes in the planned language, e.g. kantaro.ikso.net, apetito.ikso.net), others focus on multilingualism, such as webpages that present European languages in twenty-one different languages (lingvo.info) or multilingual websites for additional-language teaching (deutsch.info, slovake.info). Finally, there are projects unrelated to language, such as cyberhelp.eu, which provides help

for victims of online bullying. Most of these projects are supported financially by the European Commission.

The organisation’s international staff includes employees with various mother tongues, a group of interns mostly on Erasmus+ scholarships, and volunteers working for the European Voluntary Service. Between 2010 and 2013, fourteen interns from six countries worked with the organisation; in 2016, there were eleven volunteers from ten countries. While some of the volunteers working with E@I knew Esperanto prior to their stays, others began learning the planned language only after deciding to work for the European Voluntary Service. Volunteers usually stay for six or twelve months and are charged with tasks involving graphic design, programming, and translation, in addition to organisational work.

E@I could thus be characterised as small, dynamic, modern, and highly international. Employees do not stay for many years, they have a foreign language as their working language, and they live in a provincial town in a foreign country. Accordingly, intense communication and cooperation are presumably indispensable for the organisation’s day-to-day operations. This study draws on the same methods that we applied for studying the use of Esperanto within the speech community (see Chapter 5): our main research methods were participant observation (with note-taking and audio recording) and semi-structured interviews. Most of the data were collected in June 2016 during an ordinary workday at E@I’s office.¹⁹⁸ Our dataset amounts to 360 minutes and includes material from nine participants. The communication data were analysed using the methodology of conversation analysis (see Chapter 5). The semi-structured interviews were conducted with four volunteers (see Table 17). All interviewees were between twenty and thirty years old and worked at E@I at the time of the interview:

Table 17. Participants in the interview study

Interviewee’s name (pseudonym)	Native country	Duration of stay at the time of the interview	Length of the interview
Pierre	France	>2 years	16:34
Aengus	Ireland	>6 months	18:29
Alessandro	Italy	>6 months	26:42
Tom	UK	>5 months	48:22

198. In order to enlarge our small dataset prior to our stay at the NGO’s office we asked a staff member to record some conversations. These recordings (mainly conversations during lunch breaks) were added to the dataset.

Supplementary data were retrieved from a blog post by Aengus,¹⁹⁹ who described his work and even conducted short video interviews with fellow volunteers, who recount some of their (generally positive) experiences at the NGO.

26.3 Communication in an NGO in Esperanto

Despite the small number of interviewees and the limited scope of the recordings, our analysis has yielded interesting findings regarding Esperanto speakers' language use, in particular their behaviour in different communicative situations and their language choices. The findings suggest that Esperanto, as the corporate language of the NGO, is by far the most widely used language in everyday work there. As a rule, work-related interactions take place in Esperanto, as can be seen in the following randomly chosen example, a discussion between a volunteer (A, a native speaker of Italian) and one of the directors (B, a native speaker of Slovak) about the layout and illustration of texts:

(400) A: *Mi ne daŭrigis, ĉar se vi ne ŝatus (ĝin) (???) la ideon, mi malŝparis eble unu horon.*

B: *Estas nur kvar mil vortoj, ĉu ne, daŭrigu.*

[...]

B: *Fakte, ĝuste (mi volas diri) ke lasu iom da spaco same kiel tie ĉe tiu (???) teksto ĉar mi volas iun priskribon bla bla bla kaj super tio, ne ankoraŭ. (4). Estas bele, (4) estas iom tro da legomoj, (2) (???) aspektas kiel vegana vortaro.*

[A: I didn't continue, because if you didn't like the idea, I would waste maybe an hour.

B: It's only 4,000 words, isn't it? Go on.

(...)

B: In fact, right now I wanted to say that you should leave some space there in the same way as with this (???) text, because I want a description bla bla bla above this, not yet. (4) It's beautiful (4) there are a few too many vegetables (2) (???) looks like a vegan dictionary.]

[184 (ita-slk; oth; Partizánske) 85:50–86:39]

The interviewees confirmed the predominance of the planned language at E@I. All volunteers reported using Esperanto in the office, for both internal and external communication (Pierre: 6:10; Alessandro: 11:50). Some of the volunteers lived together in housing provided by E@I, and according to their interviews, they also used Esperanto outside the office with their flatmates (Aengus: 7:40; Alessandro:

199. See <https://teokajlibroj.wordpress.com/2016/06/02/mia-vivo-kiel-esperanto-volontulo/>.

12:20; Tom: 21:00) – remarkably, even in the case of Aengus and Tom, who share the same mother tongue.

According to the participants' statements, they were content with the effectiveness of communication in Esperanto and it did not cause them any major problems (Pierre: 14:25; Aengus: 14:45; Alessandro: 23:25). When asked about specific problems they might have in language production or reception, they answered that sometimes terms for new concepts had not yet been coined or stabilised (Pierre: 9:50, 14:35), but that in the case of individual words it was always possible to paraphrase (Alessandro: 19:20). As an example, Alessandro provided the use of *mezurilo por temperaturo* ('measuring instrument for temperature') instead of *termometro* ('thermometer').

Tom, who had started learning the language at the beginning of his stay less than five months before the interview, reported that when he didn't know a word, he relied heavily on Esperanto's word formation mechanisms, coining words on the fly like *flavkreskajeto* ('little yellow plant') for an unknown vegetable (Tom: 31:40) or *movaerilo* ('move-air-instrument') for a hand fan [187 (eng; int; Partizánske) 1:41:30].

Despite the lingua franca format that has been chosen for the organisation, there are also situations in which participants resort to other languages. The language of communication can be renegotiated in accordance with the communicative situation and, above all, the participants' language repertoires. In (401), after a very short exchange of greetings in Esperanto by speakers B (a native speaker of Polish) and C (a native speaker of Slovak), speaker A signals by answering in Slovak that he would rather resort to his mother tongue, and the whole conversation then continues in this language:

- (401) A: *Saluton*
 B: *(Saluton)*
 C: *(Saluton) sinjoro. Nu, kiel la vojaĝo?*
 A: *Strašná*
 C: *@(.).@*
 A: *Samý traktor, samý nákladiak [...]*
 [A: Hello
 B: (Hello)
 C: (Hello), Sir. Well, how was the journey?
 A: Terrible.
 C: *@(.).@*
 A: Many tractors and lorries.] [184 (slk-pol; oth; Partizánske) 51:04]

In the following excerpt, the Slovak speaker interrupts his Esperanto telephone conversation for reasons of accuracy and quotes from a document in the German original:

- (402) *Antaŭ pluraj monatoj faris <name> tiun re-kalkuladon kaj ankaŭ kontrolon, kaj evidentiĝis, ke fakte mankis du tiuj unuaj pagoj de ambaŭ tiuj projektoj kaj poste ni kontrolis kaj fakte por tiu unua projekto, ĉu ne, estis finverkita aŭ subskribita (???) kontrakto – ja ja ja (2) ŝajne (2) kaj nun mi demandis kaj do estis tio tio- ĉu ne no- (???) diris „mi ŝovas tion al tiu kvazaŭ pli-malpli juristo“ aŭ kiel nomiĝas; sed tio jam estis vere longe ĉar ni daŭre komunikis jam antaŭ unu monato precize, 23-an de majo, ke por la projekto ili eĉ akceptis, ke „für das Projekt <Name> ist es tatsächlich so, dass sich hierin ein Fehler in den Vertrag eingeschlichen hat. Ich sende Ihnen einen aktualisierten Vertrag bla bla bla“ ĉar do en tiu versio kiun mi antaŭe sendis fakte estis iu eraro pri tiuj financoj fakte (???) – ne ankaŭ ne, ĉar eĉ estis- estis eĉ eraro en ĝi kaj tiun mi nun kaptis [...]*

[Several months ago <name> made this calculation again and also double-checked it, and it turned out that in fact two of these first payments in both these projects were missing and later we checked and actually for this first project, you know, a contract was drawn up and signed (???) – yes yes yes (2) probably (2) and now I asked and there was this you know (???) said “I’m giving it to this as it were kind of lawyer” or what it is called; but this was already a long time ago, because we were already constantly communicating one month ago exactly on May 23rd, that for the project they even accepted that “für das Projekt <Name> ist es tatsächlich so, dass sich hierin ein Fehler in den Vertrag eingeschlichen hat. Ich sende Ihnen einen aktualisierten Vertrag bla bla bla”, as even in this version which I sent before there was in fact a mistake about the finances (???) – no, neither, because even in this one there was was a mistake and I found this now ...] [184 (slk; oth; Partizánske) 27:22–28:57]

Further, multilingual speech situations arise when the language resources of individual participants of the team are mobilised to solve particular tasks. In the following, one of the employees (A, a native speaker of Polish) is compiling an information leaflet and needs a suitable headline. She asks her colleagues B (a native speaker of Slovak) and C (a native speaker of English) for equivalents in their languages:

- (403) A: *Kiam oni demandas angle – Ĉu vi scias, ke ...? aŭ Ĉu vi sciis...?*
 B: *Ĉu vi scias...? Dependas, kion vi- En tiu ĉi kazo-* (mix of voices)
 B: *En tiu ĉi kazo bone – Ĉu vi scias, ke...?*
 A: *Scias.*
 B: *En la angla oni diras Did you know...? ĉu ne. Ĉu vi sciis...?*

- C: *Ne, ne ĉiu...*
- B: *Ĉu vere*, Do you know...?
- C: (Do you know *same estas*) *bone*.
- B: *Sed en tiu ĉi kazo ankaŭ* Did you know...?
- A: *Fakte ĉi tie estas* Did you know...? *kaj en Esperanto estas Ĉu vi scias...?* (1)
En la pola (2) *Czy wiesz...?*
- B: *Fakte slovake ankaŭ oni uzas ambaŭ formojn. Bone oni (???) diras Vedeli ste, že...? sed ankaŭ Viete, že ...? Do-*
- C: [???] *Ĉu estas titolo en ĉap- eh ĉapitro*
- B: *Io tia, jes. Mhm. Ĉar mi uzis ankaŭ por iu retpaĝo, mi nun ne memoras, eble eĉ 'lingvo.info' aŭ ĉe 'monda' aŭ ie.*
- A: *Do, ĝi ne estas pli bona, se estas Ĉu vi sciis, ke...?*
- B: *Sed kiam?* (1)
- A: *Nu.* (1)
- B: *Ah, lasu tiel. (???) Povas resti.*
- [A: How do you ask in English – *Did you know that?* or *Do you know?*
- B: *Do you know?* Depends on what you – in this case'
- (...) (mix of voices)
- B: In this case (it is) good – *Do you know that?*
- A: *Do*
- B: In English you say *Did you know*, don't you? Did you know (in Esperanto)
- C: No, not everyone.
- B: Really, *Do you know?*
- C: (*Do you know* is also) good.
- B: But also in this case? *Did you know.*
- A: In fact, here it is *Did you know?* And in Esperanto it is *Ĉu vi scias...?* (1)
in Polish (2) *Czy wiesz...?*
- B: Actually in Slovak one uses both forms. Well one (???) says *Vedeli ste, že...?*
But also *Viete, že ...?* so-
- C: (???) Is it a headline in a chap uh chapter?
- B: Something like that, yes. Mhm. Since I also used it for a website, I don't remember now, perhaps even in 'lingvo.info' or in 'monda' or somewhere.
- A: Well, it isn't better, if it is *Ĉu vi sciis, ke...?*
- B: But when? (1)
- A: *Nu.* (1)
- B: Ah, leave it as it is. (???) It can stay.]

[187 (pol-slk-eng; oth; Partizánske) 122:35–123:43]

At a conference, after presenting the NGO, the head of the company was asked about its language regime ("En kiuj lingvoj vi interkompreniĝas ĉefe?" – 'In which languages do you mainly communicate?'). His answer ran:

Estas amuze, jes, ĉar pluraj projektoj, pluraj lingvoj eh kvin lingvoj en unu tago en la oficejo, en kvin lingvoj, ĉar ĉiu (projekto) havas eĉ sian laborlingvon, do en kelkaj- kaj estas ankaŭ kun malsamaj partneroj, ekzemple kun ĉeĥoj ni parolas do mi slovake ili ĉeĥe, dum kunsido ni uzas la anglan, poste kun la ĉefprogramisto Esperanton, do eĉ dum unu kunsido ni povas du tri kvar lingvojn uzi eh dum ekzemple deutsch.info estis la germana, ĉe lingvo.info estis angla kaj Esperanto (...)

[It's funny, because several projects, several languages uh five languages in one day at the office, in five languages, as each (project) has its own working language, thus in some- and is also with different partners, for example, with the Czechs we speak, that is, I speak Slovak and they Czech, while during meetings we use English, later, with the chief programmer, Esperanto, so even during one meeting we might use two three four languages eh, for example, at deutsch.info, it was German, at lingvo.info it was English and Esperanto (...)] [201 (slk; pres; ?) 0:48]

One of the volunteers, when asked (later in an Internet chat) about his impression of the language choices during an ordinary working day at E@I, estimated that Esperanto was spoken 90% of the time and Slovak 10% of the time. He reported that language use in written communication was different and difficult to specify, as it depended on the project they were working on: “kiam mi devas skribi al iu, estas eble 50% Esperante, 30% angle, 20% slovake sed foje eĉ iomete france aŭ ruse” [when I have to write to someone, it is perhaps 50% in Esperanto, 30% in English, 20% in Slovak, but occasionally even a bit in French or Russian].

This is in line with our findings from the recordings made in situ. A quantification of the language use in our small dataset of 360 minutes in total, with nine participants natively speaking Slovak (3), French (1), Italian (1), Polish (1), English (2) and German (1), yielded the following results:

- Silence/laughter: 84:50 min
- Esperanto: 216:30 min (=78.4% of talking, not counting silence)
- Slovak: 53:40 min (=19.4%)
- English: 16:00 min (=5.8%)
- German: 0:20 min (=0.1%).

There was, however, a difference between language use for work purposes and in personal communication during lunch breaks:

Table 18. Use of languages during working hours and breaks

	Work	Breaks
Silence/laughter	83:30	1:20
Esperanto	138:40 (72.3%)	77:50 (82.9%)
Slovak	51:50 (26.8%)	1:50 (1.9%)
English	1:10 (0.6%)	14:50 (14.7%)
German	0:20 (0.2%)	-

The reason for these differences is clear. Esperanto is the language common to all E@I staff members, while Slovak is important for communicating with local participants. Hence these two languages predominate in the professional communication. During lunch breaks, however, only Esperanto speakers were present, dramatically diminishing the need for any other language, although interaction between the two English native speakers led to a modest use of English. This indicates that the numbers would probably change significantly depending on the linguistic composition of the small team.

As English is in extensive use as a lingua franca in the workplace these days, it has been studied intensively in this capacity (see the overview by Gunnarsson, 2014; see also Ehrenreich, 2011). Although our study does not focus on contrasting the use of Esperanto with the use of English as a lingua franca, an obvious similarity between the two studies is that, regardless of the lingua franca format chosen for an organisation, there are situations in which participants resort to other languages. That is, lingua franca communication does not preclude linguistic diversity (for English see, above all, Lüdi et al., 2010, 2016; Mondada, 2004). A major difference is that when English is adopted as a corporate language by a multinational company or organisation, it is used both as a lingua franca and as a native language, which can result in clashes, a decline in cooperation, and even an avoidance of communication due to uneven proficiency and language attitudes, as reported by a number of researchers (e.g., Beyene et al., 2009; Ehrenreich, 2011; Lønsmann, 2017; Tange & Lauring, 2009). The use of English as a corporate language is often restricted to business meetings, while different language choices are preferred in coffee breaks or scheduled social activities, as frequently reported in these studies. This can obviously not be confirmed in our study: Esperanto was used in all activities and even more often during breaks.

From the presentation of the staff working at E@I, we know that the participants of this study come from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds, they speak Esperanto with different levels of proficiency, and they are characterised by high degrees of communicative awareness and a motivation to make their exchanges successful. We might therefore expect them to employ strategies for preventing and resolving non-understanding. These include the use of metacommunication and repair techniques, which were described as significant features of Esperanto communication in Chapters 18 and 19. As for metacommunication, we find frequent occurrences of the question-tag-like discourse marker *ĉu ne* serving as an indicator of shared knowledge and consensual truths (e.g. Example (415) line 3 and Example (416) line 4) and markers of figurative expressions (e.g. *ni diru* in Example (415) and *en la itala oni dirus* in Example (416) below).

As for repairs, our dataset of interactions at E@I confirms the previous findings by providing examples of all four constellations (i.e. self-initiated self-repair,

self-initiated other-repair, other-initiated self-repair, and other-initiated other-repair). In Examples (404) and (405) below, volunteers correct their speech after realising that they have made a grammatical mistake. In the first example, the verb *ŝoki* ('to shock') is transitive already and does not have to be rendered transitive with the suffix *-ig*; accordingly, the speaker corrects the verb to *ŝoki* instead of *ŝokigi*. Note the pauses signalling hesitation or uncertainty. In contrast, in the second example below, the same suffix is first missing (*pacus*) and then added, giving *pacigus*.

(404) A: *Mi memoras tion, ke mi (.) ŝokigis homojn, kaj homoj ankaŭ (.) ŝokis min.*

[A: I remember that I (.) shockified people, and people also (.) shocked me.]

[203 (?; infl; Partizánske) 6:40]

(405) A: *Ni batalas por paco. [...]*

B: *Ni batalas, ĉar nia dio estas pli bona ol via dio.*

A: *Ĝuste.*

B: *Kaj li- li **pacus** ĉion pli bone. (1) Pacigus*

[A: We fight for peace. (...)]

B: We fight, because our god is better than your god.

A: Right.

B: And he- he would peace everything better. (1) Pacify]

[187 (?-eng; oth; Partizánske) 0:28]

Word search can also be observed. As we know, it can be signalled or initiated in different ways. In Example (406), speaker A is not sure about the name of a particular berry and offers two candidate expressions, *frago* ('strawberry') and *frambo* ('raspberry').

(406) A: *Kiom normale fakte kostas ĉe vi fragoj? Ĉu estas fragoj aŭ framboj?*

(several): *Fragoj*

B: *Eh, fragoj, kilogramo, tre tre dependas [...]*

[A: How much do strawberries actually cost where you come from?
Is it fragoj or framboj?

(several): *Fragoj*

B: *Er, strawberries, a kilogram, it varies a lot (...)]*

[187 (pol-deu; oth; Partizánske) 113:48]

In the following, the speaker starts to form the expression for 'stove' using an element from his native tongue – a technique that is often successful in Esperanto because of the international character of its vocabulary – when another speaker notices his lexical gap and gives the correct term *fajrujo* ('stove'):

- (407) A: *Fakte ŝi sidas en la kuirejo, eh malvarme, kaj li kreas grandan eh:*
 B: @Fajron@
 A: *Fajron. En la: eh Mi ne scias kiel diri: stove? Kiel oni diras? Por la eh*
 B: *Fajrujo*
 [A: In fact she is sitting in the kitchen, uh cold, and he creates a big uh:
 B: @Fire@
 A: Fire. In the: uh I don't know how to say it: stove? How do you say? For the uh
 B: Fireplace] [203 (eng-?; infl; Partizánske) 20:50–21:06]

The same technique is initially applied for *maria-* in Example (408), before the speaker remembers the Esperanto root (*edz-* ‘husband’) and produces his own expression (*edziĝejo* ‘marrying place’), which is then corrected:

- (408) A: *Mi pensas ke, kiam mi estis ĉe la (.) m- maria- (.) la edziĝejo?*
 B: *Geedziĝfesto.*
 A: *Ge- Geedz- Geedziĝfesto de mia kuzino, mi ĉiam salutis virojn per mano.*
 [A: I think that when I was at the (.) m- maria- (.) the marriage place?
 B: Wedding.
 A: We- Wed- Wedding of my cousin, I would always greet men with a hand-shake.] [203 (eng-?; infl; Partizánske) 18:15]

Code-switches can often be found in repairs, as can be seen in the following explicit questions about vocabulary.

- (409) A: *Kio estas listo de eh: (1) kiel diri (2) eh traits?*
 B: *Kio?*
 C: *Markoj*
 A: *Markoj de normalaj homoj*
 D: @ (1) @
 E: *Ah la ecoj*
 [A: What is a list of er: (1) how to say (2) uh traits?
 B: What?
 C: Marks
 A: Marks of normal people
 D: @ (1) @
 E: Ah, the traits] [203 (eng-?-?-?-?); infl; Partizánske) 23:54–24:08]
- (410) A: *Tio estas ŝerca novaĵoj pri eh Brexit. La titolo estas La tuta British Empire estas eh devenis e- devenis (???) (.) Ĉiu lando en la for- antaŭa Empe- Em- Empire ↑*
 B: *Imperio*
 A: *Imperio. (...)*

[A: This is humorous news about uh Brexit. The title is The whole British Empire is uh comes from co – comes (???) Every country in the for- former Empi- Em- Empire?

B: Imperio

A: Imperio. (...)] [184 (eng-fra; oth; Partizánske) 71:10]

The context of communication in the workplace clearly illustrates that repairs of this type can be considered a sign of cooperation and solidarity. The speakers are eager to support one another in their endeavour to learn the language and to communicate successfully.

Instances of other-initiated self-repair seldom involve errors. Interactants raise queries after mishearing something, which can be caused by background noise or unclear pronunciation, as in Example (411):

(411) A: *Ĉu vi veturas al ĝardeno aŭ hejmen?*

B: *Al la kabano, ĉar mi havas multegon por fari.*

A: *Ah, kaj kiel via floro, ĉu travivis?*

B: *Ha?*

A: *Ĉu floro travivis? Tiu akva floro?*

B: *Tiu akvofloro travivis, jes, tre bone.*

A: *No, sed faru iun foton [...]*

[A: Are you going to the garden or home?

B: To the hut, because I have much to do.

A: Ah, and how is the flower, has it survived?

B: Huh?

A: Has the flower survived? The water lily?

B: The water lily, yes, very well.

A: Well, then you should take a photo...]

[187 (pol-slk; oth; Partizánske) 12:24–42]

The most interesting type of repair is other-initiated other-repair, as this is considered to be rare (see Chapter 19). We found several occurrences of other-initiated other-repairs in our dataset, with the other-repair in most cases performed in a direct way without any restraint or modulation, as can be seen in Examples (412) and (413):

(412) A: *Li diris hodiaŭ: Ni gajnis sen eh unu pafo [...] Vere nekredeble. [...] Sed mi ja kredus, ke li vere pensas (?) tiel, ĉar li estas tiom maldekstre, ke [...]*

B: *Dekstre*

[A: He said today: We won without one shot (...) Really incredible(...) But I would think that he really thinks (?) like that, because he is so leftist, that (...)]

B: Rightist] [187 (eng-slk; oth; Partizánske) 143:10–144:07]

(413) [...]

A: *Pardonu, mi interrompis vin.*

B: *Ne gravas. Mi- mi daŭris.*

C: *Daŭrigis.*

[(...)]

A: Sorry, I've interrupted you:

B: Doesn't matter. I- I endured

C: Continued. [...] [204 (?-eng-?; infl; Partizánske) 45:28–46:01]

The use of metaphors and phraseological units is also characteristic of the communication at the NGO, as Examples (414) and (415) illustrate.

(414) A: [...] *Mi deziras bonan kaj veran semajnfinojn, jes.*

B: *Ankaŭ al vi, <name>. Dankon pro via vizito.*

A: *Vizito? Tio estas vizito?*

B: *Ni ĉiuj havas tiom da L (???)*

A: L *Mi laboras kiel azeno tie ĉi @ kaj (vi diras) vizito @*

[...]

[A: (...) I wish you a nice and real weekend, yes.

B: The same to you, <name>. Thanks for your visit.

A: Visit? This is a visit?

B: We all have so much L [(???)

A: L I work like a mule here @ and (you say) visit @]

[187 (pol-slk; oth; Partizánske) 11:30]

(415) [...] *estas la demando, ĉu tiu krizo kiu laŭ mi ne ne haltiĝis aŭ ne (3) ĉesis, sed nun nur havas iun transirperiodon kaj ĝi iĝos multe pli grava aŭ multe pli terura ol estis tiu antaŭpreparo 2008-a 2009-a. Ni diru, ke estas laŭ mi nur tiuj **tondroj antaŭ la ŝtormo** aŭ antaŭ la grandega ŝtormo. Do la demando estas, ĉu estas reale ekonomia krizo aŭ morala.*

[(...) the question is whether this crisis, which I would say didn't stop or didn't (3) cease but only has a transition period, and it will be much more serious or much more terrible than this preparation in 2008 2009 was. One might say that, in my opinion, it is only the thunder before the storm or before the huge storm (cf. English *the calm before the storm*). So the question is whether it is really an economic crisis or a moral one.] [196 (slk; pres; ?), 51:15–44]

As described in Chapter 21, speakers like to use set expressions from their native languages to be expressive, either as ad hoc translations (see Example (416)) or – if they consider them to be sufficiently well-known – as directly borrowed (see Example (417)). Both examples come from casual conversations during breaks:

- (416) A: *Kaj ĉu la aliaj volontuloj, ĉu ili estas amikaj aŭ-*
 B: *Sufiĉe amikemaj, fakte, eble nur tiu unu belgino*
 A: *Kiu?*
 B: *Tiu unu belgino – vi konis – (???) iometa almenaŭ en la komenco iom-*
 A: *Stranga.*
 B: *En la itala oni dirus *simpatia* kiel kolbaso en la pugo.*
 All: *@@@@ Kio?*
 C: *Ĉu tio estas virina aŭ vira proverbo? @*
 [A: And the other interns, are they friendly or-?
 B: Quite friendly, in fact, maybe just this one girl from Belgium
 A: Who?
 B: This one girl from Belgium – you knew – (???) a bit, at least at the beginning a bit-
 A: Strange.
 B: In Italian we would say as nice as a sausage in the arse
 All: @@@@ What?
 C: Is it a men's or women's proverb
 [204 (eng-ita-slk; infl; Partizánske) 9:59–10:36]
- (417) A: *mhm, bona viando*
 B: *Sed your grandfather would turn in his grave now.*
 C: *Kio? Kiu?*
 B: *Lia avo ne ŝatis <name> (2) eh la malĝentileco de <name>*
 C: *Ah, ne ne, ĉar ne estas la lasta peco.*
 [A: mhm good meat
 B: But your grandfather would turn in his grave now.
 C: What? Who?
 B: His grandfather didn't like <name> (2) uh the impoliteness of <name>
 C: ah, no no, because it's not the last piece.
 [204 (eng-eng-pol; infl; Partizánske) 16:20–16:45]

The majority of phraseological units in this dataset, however, are original Esperanto phrases, particularly quotes derived from works by Zamenhof, as we will see below.

Humour and wordplay were another feature we identified as ubiquitous in Esperanto communication (see Chapter 20). Our investigation of the conversations at E@I supports this. Linguistic humour permeates interactions in our dataset, both in work-related and in casual talks during breaks. One type includes puns that are based on the deliberate misinterpretation of pseudo-homonyms. An example is the word *bombono* ('candy/bonbon') that is interpreted by an interactant as *bomb-on-o* (bomb + suffix *-on-* 'fraction' + N marker, i.e. part of a bomb) in Example (184)

(?; oth; Partizánske) 1:26:47]. In Example (418), a speaker expresses his disapproval of the Esperantised form *Nitro* ‘Nitra’ (a Slovak city where the Esperanto World Congress was to take place later that summer) by toying with its interpretation as *ni tro* (‘we too much’):

- (418) A: *Nitra aŭ Nitro (1) Mi estas scivola.*
 [...]
 A: *Tio ne plaĉas al mi. (.) Nu bone (.) Nitro.*
 B: *Ni tro drinkas.*
 A: *Ni tro (.) @(1)@*
 [A: Nitra or Nitro (1) I’m curious.
 [...]
 [A: I don’t like this (.) Well, OK (.) Nitro
 B: We drink too much
 A: We too much (.) @(1)@] [182 (slk-slk; oth; Partizánske) 22:20]

Similarly, discussions of linguistic problems often include a jocular note:

- (419) A: *Do, ne murdisto, murd-anto, aŭ?*
 B: *Murdanto.*
 C: *Sed -isto povas esti ankaŭ por homo, kiu ofte faras la aferon.*
 D: *Esperantisto.*
 C: *Jes, aŭ biciklisto.*
 A: *Jes, iu kredo, aŭ-*
 E: *Sed fakte homoj pagas min por Esperanti.*
 A: *@(.).@*
 B: *Do se vi nur iun akcidente mortigas surstrate vi estas murdanto, ne murdisto. Se vi tion faras intence kaj ofte, (vi iĝas murdisto).*
 [...]
 [A: So, not *murdisto* [professional killer], *murd-anto* [killer], or?
 B: *murdanto* [killer]
 C: But *-isto* can be also for a person, who often does the thing
 D: *Esperantisto* [Esperanto speaker]
 C: Yes, or *biciklisto* [cyclist]
 A: Yes, some belief, or-
 E: But in fact people pay me for doing Esperanto.
 A: *@(.).@*
 B: So, if you just kill someone on the street by accident, you’re a *murdanto*, not a *murdisto*. If you do this intentionally and often, you become a *murdisto* (...)] [204 (eng-slk-fra-?-?; infl; Partizánske) 25:50–26:20]

Comic effect can also be achieved by means of intertextuality, in particular by allusions to classic works by Zamenhof. In Example (420), a speaker mocks a coughing person by citing and twisting a line from Zamenhof's poem *Ho, mia kor'* ('Oh, my heart'), which is met with general laughter. In Example (421) – a humorous discussion about forcing people to learn Esperanto – we find an ironical allusion to *pacaj batalantoj* ('peaceful fighters'), a phrase used in Zamenhof's poem *La Espero* ('The Hope') (see footnote 104):

(420) A: *vi tusas senĉese.*

B: *Ho mia kor' Ho mia pulm' la himno devus esti*

[A: you are coughing without interruption

B: 'Oh my heart! Oh my lung' that's what the text of the hymn should be

[204 (eng-ita; infl; Partizánske) 31:30]

(421) *Ni povas devigi. Ni mortigos nur virojn, kaj virinoj estas devige- devas lerni Esperanton. [...] Oni povis konvertigadi homojn al kristanismo, al Islamo; ni devos konvertigadi al Esperanto. La "pacaj batalantoj", ĉu ne?*

[We can force. We'll kill only men, and women are forced- need to learn Esperanto. (...) They could convert time and again to Christianity, to Islam; we'll need to convert everybody to Esperanto. The "peaceful fighters", aren't we?]

[187 (slk; oth; Partizánske) 0:03–25]

The E@I team's multilingual character is occasionally the source of humour. Interactants deviate from the chosen corporate language to deliberately tease one another by using each other's native languages instead of Esperanto. In the following conversation about football over lunch, held partly in English and partly in Esperanto, participant A (a native speaker of Slovak) who had been speaking Esperanto, encouraging the others to have some cake for dessert, suddenly addresses one of the English-speaking volunteers, mocking him with an emphatic code-switch and an ostentatious use of some sentences in his best schoolboy English:

(422) A: *Ni trovu la lingvon. <name>, help us. Save the world. Eat the cake.*

B-E: @@@

A: *Ĉu iu volas?*

C: *Mi volus, sed mi ne plu havas spacon.*

D: *Ni povus lasi ĝin kiel vespermanĝo.*

[A: We should find the language. <name>, help us. Save the world. Eat the cake.

B-E: @@@

A: Does anyone want to?

D: I would like to, but I haven't got any space.

C: We could leave it as dinner.] [204 (slk-?-eng; infl; Partizánske) 40:17]

In the following exchange, a code-switch is followed by a series of allusions and creative wordplay referring to Brexit, which had been announced that same day:

- (423) A: *Fakte mi eĉ povus kompreni iomete (???) Esperante.*
 (mix of voices)
 B: *Maybe we should switch into another language.*
 [...]

 A: *You use la ne-eŭropan lingvo.*
 All: @@@
 A: *La angla.*
 C: *Ĝuste @ Exter-EU-language.*
 A: *Ĝi estas de iu stranga il- eh eh*
 C: *island, ajlando @(.)@ insulo*
 A: *insulo*
 [...]

 D.: *@Ĉu ni voĉdonu? Momenton, ni voĉdonas.@ Kiel en Brit- en Britio*
 (mix of voices)
 C: *Estas <name>exit aŭ kio*
 All: @(.)@
 D.: *Momenton, referendumo*
 [A: In fact, I could even understand something (???) in Esperanto.
 (mix of voices)
 B: *Maybe we should switch into another language.*
 (...)

 C: *You use the non-European language.*
 All: @@@
 A: *English*
 C: *Exactly @ an exter-EU-language*
 A: *it is from a strange il- eh eh*
 C: *island, ilando @(.)@island*
 A: *island*
 (...)

 D: *@Should we vote? Just a moment @ we vote, like in Brit- in Britain*
 (mix of voices)
 C: *it is a <name>exit or what?*
 All: @(.)@
 D: *Just a moment, a referendum]*

[187 (?-slk-eng-?; oth; Partizánske) 126:31-127:15]

These examples confirm what we said in Chapter 20: communication is much more than just a transfer of information. People want to be expressive, creative and occasionally humorous in their language use, and it does not make a difference that their

interaction takes place in a planned language: Esperanto serves these purposes too. Our dataset has shown that this is also true in a workplace setting. Furthermore, it endorses our previous insight that a large part of the humorous communication in Esperanto is based on language and culture. That is, it depends above all on linguistic elements and on speakers' background knowledge of Esperanto and its speech community.

26.4 Some concluding remarks on Esperanto as a corporate language

Our findings suggest that Esperanto can function successfully as a *lingua franca* in international companies and organisations. It is possible to acquire the language within a relatively short space of time if the intention is to use it for professional purposes. In the NGO it served both as a means of communication for professional tasks and as a medium for casual conversations during breaks, enabling people to communicate on an equal footing.

A number of findings from our previous investigation were confirmed by this study, in particular those about the use of phraseology, including both internationally known and Esperanto-specific units, frequent occurrences of different types of repair mechanisms, and the predilection for language-based humour among Esperanto speakers. Of particular interest was the result that Esperanto as a corporate language leaves room for other languages. When Esperanto is used in the workplace, this is not for the sake of the language, rather it is a tool to accomplish tasks and to realise projects, and it is the tasks and projects and the people involved in them that decide which language they use. This is why, in addition to the planned language, the local language of Slovak, English, and other languages were regularly used. Participants used their linguistic resources flexibly and resorted to their mother tongues or other *lingua francas* to ensure mutual comprehension.

We are, of course, aware of the limited scope of this investigation. Research on Esperanto as a language in professional settings is still in its infancy. Further studies are needed to determine whether the behaviour described can be regarded as typical of Esperanto communication in the workplace beyond the NGO under investigation here.

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