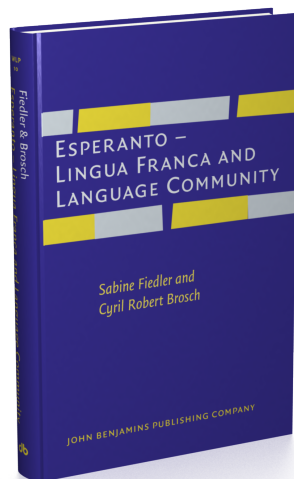


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Esperanto – Lingua Franca and Language Community

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The main characteristics of Esperanto communication

The purpose of this book has been to describe the planned language Esperanto as a language in use. With this aim in mind, we compiled a comprehensive dataset of naturally occurring communication including speech events such as spontaneous everyday conversations, panel and working group discussions, lectures, official speeches, and excursions. In addition, we conducted interviews with Esperanto speakers to learn about their specific use of the language, which helped us to interpret interactions adequately. On this basis it has been possible to determine the main features of Esperanto communication, which will be summarised in this first concluding chapter in the order they were discussed in Part IV of this book. We will then bring together insights and ideas from across the preceding chapters from two specific perspectives: the speech community and its culture (Chapter 28); and the issue of language ownership (Chapter 29).

We found that Esperanto interactions are rich in metacommunication and repair work. **Metacommunication** is extensively used with the aim of structuring speech, improving audiences' reception, checking understanding and maintaining a successful relationship with other participants. Another highly relevant strategy for ensuring understanding is **repair work**. We have found both self- and other-repair, which show that correct language use and understanding are of crucial importance for Esperanto speakers. The so-called let-it-pass principle, often described as a characteristic of English as a lingua franca, is not typical of talk in Esperanto. Speakers' abundant use of metacommunication and repair strategies illustrates their well-developed metalinguistic consciousness and awareness of shared rules as a basis for successful communication.

Our study shows that **humour** is pervasive in Esperanto communication. Not only do cabaret and literary genres such as satire have a long tradition, but play on words, teasing and heckling are also an integral element in casual talk, at meetings, in debates and forums. They are also a characteristic feature of interaction in Esperanto in the workplace, with a high degree of language-based humour.

That Esperanto has the potential for rich and expressive forms of communication was also seen in our study of phraseology and metaphors. Esperanto speakers make extensive use of **phraseological units**, including internationally known

phrases and proverbs and culture-specific expressions that mirror the life of the speech community. Phraseology is applied with a large variety of pragmatic functions. Recurrent forms of speech events (e.g. meetings and congresses) have resulted in the emergence of conventionalised language used for negotiating meaning (e.g. *ni diru, por tiel diri*) and floor taking (e.g. *Mia kongresnumero estas ...*). The **meta-phors** used in Esperanto are mainly based on subjects that relate to speakers' realm of experience such as nature, the human body and technology.

Our investigation of **code-switching** showed that Esperanto speakers are disinclined to incorporate other-language material into their language use. In the same way as in word formation, where endogenous types (i.e. coinages based on Esperanto morphemes) are preferred to exogenous ones (i.e. borrowings from other languages), code-switching is not a primary characteristic of Esperanto communication. Quantitatively, it is used to a lesser degree than in other languages and, qualitatively, in a relatively small variety of functions. These functions include the insertion of words and phrases for bridging lexical gaps, to enhance lexical precision, for reasons of politeness and to evoke humour. The relative infrequency of code-switching in our dataset indicates two differences between Esperanto and other languages: studies of code-switching in English as a lingua franca focus on interlocutors' use of expressions from their mother tongues that are motivated by the wish to highlight their national identity and signal their culture, which is a function not found in our data. Another difference is the observation that speakers today often insert English words and phrases into their speech for reasons of prestige and "coolness". This kind of code-switching is stigmatised in Esperanto, despite speakers' extensive knowledge of foreign languages. These differences can be explained as part of Esperanto speakers' identification with "their" planned language and its speech community, which finds its expression in high degrees of language loyalty.

Our study of **written vs spoken** Esperanto was motivated, first, by the unusual fact that Esperanto (and planned languages in general) emerged in its written form before being spoken, in contrast to the situation with ethnic languages, and, second, by the fact that the Internet has had a major impact on Esperanto and that speakers are increasingly pursuing their mutual interests through social media. Our exploration has shown that Esperanto communication is largely similar across speech and writing, and the language used in computer-mediated communication also complies with these same norms of language: novel graphic techniques (e.g. specific abbreviations, emoticons) characteristic of blogs, chats and forums are used only to a limited extent.

Our discussion of attitudes to the **accents** that prevail in the speech community was motivated by awareness that it is very hard to acquire native-like pronunciation of a foreign language after puberty, and that it is learners' pronunciation in particular that decides their acceptance as speakers in the community. Our research has

shown that accented speech is considered an ordinary and expected feature in the second-language speech community of Esperanto. Esperanto speakers strive for “international” pronunciation, i.e. a way of speaking that does not reveal a speaker’s L1. In contrast to the situation with ethnic languages, native speakers (*denaskuloj*) are not immediately recognisable by their accents, and, in general, particular accents are not associated with prestige. This finding is especially noteworthy against the background of studies of English as a lingua franca, which describe hierarchies of non-preferred accents among non-native speakers of various L1s, and recent explorations of the acceptance of “new speakers” of minority languages.

Living languages change as their speakers’ needs change. Our preliminary study of **language change** has verified that this principle holds for Esperanto by describing instances of change across several levels of the language system. At the same time, we have seen that language change in Esperanto is slow, something that can be attributed to a balance of those impact factors that, on the one hand, speed up the evolution of the language and language change and, on the other, slow it down. The greatest influence on the evolution of Esperanto is exercised by its speakers. They feel the need for new lexis and coin new words, which will then be accepted or refused by other speakers. Their decisions are made on the basis of their language knowledge and their attitudes to Esperanto as a planned language, where observing the rules is a key factor in its further development. Evidence of language change is of the utmost importance for Esperanto, as it can be considered proof that Esperanto really does function as a fully fledged language.

Our description of language choice and practices in an NGO using **Esperanto as a corporate language** generally supported the validity of our findings about the main characteristics of Esperanto communication. It provided evidence that as a planned language Esperanto is also a valid option as a lingua franca outside the private sphere, its predominant domain to date. Esperanto makes workplace communication with an international staff possible by providing a common language while using the potential of their mother tongues and other lingua francas. Workers applied multilingual practices in accordance with particular communicative tasks and settings, and showed that adopting Esperanto as a corporate language did not necessarily lead to a devaluation of other languages.

