

A note to the reader

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Esperanto – Lingua Franca and Language Community

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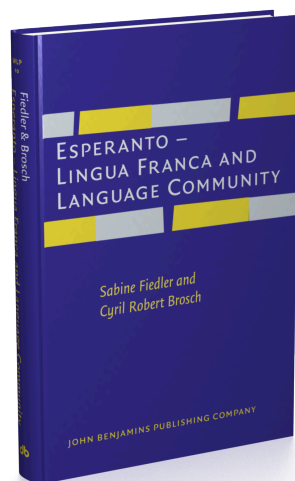
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A note to the reader

As its title suggests, this book is concerned with the use of Esperanto. In our experience, very few people know that this language really is used, in both writing and speech, and that it has found speakers all over the world. To a certain extent, even to us, it is sometimes hard to imagine that a language created by a single person at his desk has developed for more than a hundred and thirty years to become a fully fledged means of communication. It is our wish to provide insights into as many fields and ways in which Esperanto is applied as possible, and we do hope that the book will find an open-minded reader who is willing to embark on this description and to gain their own impression based on the facts that we present.

The research leading to the results presented in this book received funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (grant agreement 613344, project MIME). This support is gratefully acknowledged. MIME stands for "Mobility and Inclusion in Multilingual Europe". It is a research project on multilingualism that over the four years of its operation (2014–2018) brought together more than 70 researchers in eleven disciplines and from 22 universities and research institutes in 16 countries. The authors of this book worked in a research group dealing with the optimal use of mutually complementary strategies for communication in multilingual settings, such as translation and interpreting, the development of receptive skills within language families (so-called intercomprehension) and machine translation. Our team at the University of Leipzig was responsible for the use of *lingua francas*. As English is presently the language mainly associated with this term, English functioning as a *lingua franca* was the focus of our research, with investigations into migration and study-abroad contexts (see, for example, Fiedler & Brosch [eds.], 2018 and Fiedler & Brosch, 2019).

Because of our background as Esperanto speakers, we felt motivated to extend our studies to another language that has been used as a *lingua franca*, the planned language Esperanto. We were encouraged to continue this work when, in a comparison among the strategies studied within the framework of MIME as regards costs, user independence, linguistic accuracy, and inclusion, we found that some of the labels seemed to fit for English as a *lingua franca*, but not for Esperanto and could therefore not be verified as characteristics of a *lingua franca* as such. This was the starting point for exploring in more detail what the practice of Esperanto communication looks like, how successful the members of the international speech

community are in the use of their language, and where we can find similarities and differences when comparing the use of English and Esperanto in comparable contexts. The results of this investigation are found in this book.

The book is written in English. This choice of language was not difficult, given that English is the dominant language used to report research findings today. But there is a certain irony in the fact that this international language is used to describe the *Lingvo Internacia* (“international language”, the official name of Zamenhof’s project published under the pseudonym “Esperanto” – ‘one who hopes’ – in 1887). It would have been easier to write this book in German, our mother tongue, for reasons that probably do not need to be further elaborated. Our second-best choice would have been Esperanto, a language in which – although it is also a second language to us as English is – we are more comfortable and confident than in any other foreign language. Speaking and writing in Esperanto we have the feeling that the language adapts to us, whereas using English we have to adapt to the language. We will return to this topic in the concluding chapter on language “ownership”, by which time we assume that the reader will know enough about Esperanto to understand what we mean. We use English to address a large readership, and we are grateful for the help that we received to make the book a good read for both native and non-native speakers of English by making improvements in both language and style. Naturally, we are solely responsible for any remaining mistakes and imperfections.

This book greatly benefited from the comments made by Goro Christoph Kimura, Timothy G. Reagan and the General Editor of the Studies in World Language Problems Series, Humphrey Tonkin. We would also like to thank Till-Dietrich Dahlenburg, Matthew Rockey and Humphrey Tonkin for their assistance in formatting, editing, and proofreading the manuscript. Furthermore, we are grateful to the members of the Gesellschaft für Interlinguistik e.V. (Society for Interlinguistics [registered association]; www.interlinguistik-gil.de) for helpful comments on parts of this book that were presented at their annual meetings. Above all we owe much to the Esperanto speakers whose language was observed and recorded for this study over the course of several years, and to those who willingly agreed to participate in our interview studies. Dankon.