

Innovation and Intervention in the Terminology of Esperanto: the Case of Paronymic Neology

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Abstract

Kiselman (2011) has pointed out that paronymy was a productive strategy in the design of proto-Esperanto, as can be seen in such pairs as *vidi* / **viti* ‘to see’ vs. ‘to watch’, *aŭdi* / **aŭti* ‘to hear’ vs. ‘to listen’, etc. Although Zamenhof appears to have abandoned this approach by 1887, dozens of paronymic sets remained in the language, with some vestigial pairs still embedded in the core vocabulary (*pezi* / *pesi* ‘to weigh’ intransitive / transitive).

In this paper, I explore whether paronymic neology is still a key mechanism in the development of Esperanto’s lexical inventory. An initial survey of paronyms across a sample of specialised dictionaries suggests that there are many forms of paronymic neology, ranging from relatively ‘successful’ distinctions such as *momento* / *momanto* ‘moment’ / ‘momentum’ (items listed in Waringhien et al. 2020 but originating in a dictionary of astronomy), as well as a long tail of ‘forgotten paronyms’, such as *matrico* / *matriĉo* ‘matrix’ / ‘table’ (a distinction proposed in mathematics). This observation raises a number of empirical questions. What is the proportion of paronymic items in the core vocabulary? How many of these items express symmetrical meanings (belonging to the same lexical field), or asymmetrical relations (with one item, usually the new coinage, belonging to a specific domain)? Furthermore, is it possible to observe an increase in the specialised lexicon in Esperanto over time? Such an observation would support the hypothesis of ‘terminological growth’ (Kageura 2012).

In order to address these questions, I extract paronyms from three corpora of specialised dictionaries, corresponding to three distinct periods of terminological production in Esperanto: a) 1940-1969: *Jarlibro* of the *Universala Esperanto-Asocio*, b) 1970-1999: Eichholtz’s list of > 10 000 terms, and c) 1995-2022: 66 online glossaries and specialised dictionaries. By way of comparison, I present statistics on paronymy in the core vocabulary (samples from Waringhien et al. 2020). Finally, I verify ‘uptake’ (the implementation rate of a sample of these terms) in a diachronic corpus (Maradan 2021, Wennergren 2021).

In addition to empirical analysis, it is necessary to turn to a more general consideration: is paronymic neology rooted in the general cultural framework of Esperanto? As has often been noted, there are strong affinities between Esperantism as an experimental model of language planning and terminology as a practical discipline. The impact of logicism on Wüster’s principles (biunivocity, deep conceptual structure, etc.) has been noted by several observers (Candel 2007, Samain 2010, Savatovksy

2022). Hauptenthal (1976, cited in Blanke 2008) states that the early supporters of Esperanto were keen to promote a logicist approach, postulating that the lexical inventory of the language should be as technically precise and monosemic as possible. It remains to be seen whether such a stereotypically 'wüsterian' legacy still lingers in contemporary Esperanto and the Esperantophone community.

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