

CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE IN ESPERANTO

As is well known Esperanto is an artificial language, although its long-term survival and the existence of native speakers is probably attributable to its adherence to universal principles ruling natural languages. However, no monolinguals in Esperanto are reported and, for the most of its speakers Esperanto is often a secondary language added to several others. Along with these facts, it cannot be denied that Esperanto was born in written, i. e. it was planned by writing prior to its first oral uses. Differently from other languages, Esperanto cannot be linked to an original referential community with a certain degree of geographic and social cohesion. As a result, a language first designed in writing is nowadays spoken by a discontinuous community as a secondary language to many.

How do features like secondariness, discontinuity and written origin affect language unity? I shall focus on these challenges and show how nevertheless a certain standard usage of Esperanto has evolved independently of objective prescription.

The question is to be asked in the fields of phonology, morphology and syntax. Do speakers of different primary languages change their articulatory habits when speaking Esperanto, or is accent a major source of difficulty for comprehension? How do speakers with richer verbal morphology accommodate to a simpler one? Esperanto word order is acknowledgedly freer than in many other languages: do speakers of Esperanto with a more rigid word order in their first languages tend to apply their native patterns or do they accommodate to any mainstream tendency if any in Esperanto?

Examples of the written language will be elicited from tekstaro.com, a rich corpus of Esperanto texts, and from translated material. Examples of pronunciation will be collected from recorded material already in internet. In all cases, data in Esperanto will be compared to data in the first languages of speakers.