

Invisible regularization in a constructed language

The pronunciation of acronyms in Esperanto

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It is probably impossible to design a complete language for any human being, or even for a committee: there will always be gaps, aspects which one has not thought about. One example of this is the pronunciation of acronyms, a topic which is usually not even formally regularized for natural languages, while at the same time it has been shown (e.g. by Torres-Tamarit and Martinez-Paricio 2023 for Spanish) that there are certain tendencies.

This paper reports on a study conducted among a sample of 80 Esperanto speakers on their pronunciation of acronyms. The speakers were all highly proficient (among them were a large number of the prestigious Academy of Esperanto) and had many different linguistic backgrounds. In an experiment inspired by Torres-Tamarit and Martinez-Paricio's work (and a Dutch follow-up by the current author), they were presented with a number of acronyms such as FRE and TALGO that are unknown at least in the Esperanto community and asked how they would pronounce these.

The pronunciation of acronyms in Esperanto has not been regulated; as far as we have been able to find out, the topic is not discussed in-depth in any existing grammar of the language. Yet the results are strikingly similar to what is found for Spanish and Dutch, in spite of the fact that most participants did not speak either of those languages. For instance, almost everybody pronounced the second form as bisyllabic [tál.go], whereas very few chose [fre] as the pronunciation of the first form ([fo.ro.é] was preferred by the majority).

In our discussion we conclude that (a) a certain informal regularization has been going on in the language due to the existence of well-known acronyms in the Esperanto community such as *UEA* (Universala Esperanto-Asocio, Universal Esperanto Association) and *SAT* (Sennacieca Asocio Tutmonda, Worldwide anationalist association) and (b) acronyms seem to be due to certain (quasi-)universal tendencies as to their pronunciation which, combined with the grammar of Esperanto as to the acceptability of certain consonant clusters and stress assignment, gives the patterns we find.

Reference

Torres-Tamarit, Francesc & Violeta Martínez-Paricio (2023) The prosody of Spanish acronyms. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory*. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11049-023-09599-w>