

Esperanto linguistics – some reflections on 35 years of research

Interlinguistics has played a role at International Congresses of Linguists on several occasions, e.g. in Geneva in 1931 and in Paris in 1948 (Schubert 1989). The first time that the author of this paper came into contact with questions of Esperanto and interlinguistics at an ICL was at the 14th ICL in Berlin in 1987, where the Round Table "Interlinguistics/Planned Languages" was held.

The renewed focus on interlinguistics at the ICL 2024 should provide an opportunity to look back at what has been achieved in the field of Esperanto linguistics since then. Surveys (e.g. Pereltsvaig 2017) show a significant increase in research on Esperanto in the core areas of linguistics (such as phonetics, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics) as well as in interdisciplinary fields, even if these are not comparable in breadth and depth to research on ethnic languages. In recent years, there has also been an increase in studies on the practical functioning of the planned language, with attention also being paid to oral communication (e.g. Fiedler/Brosch 2022). Comprehensive Esperanto corpora have been created and access to Esperanto archives and specialised libraries has been expanded, greatly improving the conditions for both synchronic and diachronic studies for linguists. In addition, extensive work on the Esperanto-speaking community is now available (e.g. Fians 2021).

As far as the infrastructure of Esperanto linguistics is concerned, little has changed in recent decades. Esperanto and interlinguistics play a somewhat larger role at the University of Amsterdam, at Zaozhuang University (China) and, above all, at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. However, the subject is not generally institutionalised at universities and both teaching and research are usually carried out by linguists from other disciplines in addition to their professional duties, although it is worth mentioning that Esperanto occasionally manages to gain prominence through externally funded projects and that a great deal of research is carried out within specialist organisations in individual countries (e.g. the Gesellschaft für Interlinguistik).

There have been many successful attempts in the past to integrate interlinguistics into larger specialist fields such as Language Policy and Planning, and to study Esperanto in relation to representations of other languages. However, this should not obscure the fact that Esperanto, as a planned language, has special features. This paper will take a closer look at these peculiarities of the planned language and their causes, concentrating on the areas of phraseology, humour, native speakers and influences from other languages.

Bibliography

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