TO CRAFT A CULTURE:

LANGUAGE ATTITUDES AND THE VITALITY OF ESPERANTO

by

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Abstract

Esperanto, a constructed international auxiliary language, has attained a level of recognition and use far exceeding that of any comparable language project. This popularity has extended to countries such as China and Japan despite Esperanto's Eurocentric phonology and vocabulary, for which it is often criticized. This paper suggests that Esperanto's success is attributable not necessarily to the language's design nor its conduciveness to international use, but more so to the language attitudes held by its speakers and the cohesiveness and broad appeal of its internationalist philosophy.

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CHAPTER 1

Dr. Hoper's International Language

Introduction

Ludovic Lazarus Zamenhof was born in the right place at the right time. That is not to say that the eastern European city of Białystok in the late 1800s, as Zamenhof would have experienced it, was an ideal place to grow up; in fact, it was wrought with interethnic conflict between Roman Catholic Poles, Eastern Orthodox Russians, and a consistently persecuted Yiddish-speaking Jewish majority, to which Zamenhof himself belonged. But there was no place quite like Białystok to produce a man as linguistically ambitious as Zamenhof. As a product of his parents' own diverse language backgrounds, his multilingual upbringing, and his own academic interests, Zamenhof ultimately spoke fourteen languages - and five of them fluently (Kiselman, n.d.). He saw the prejudices of his hometown, and more broadly of the world at large, as stemming from the lack of a neutral common language by which these ethnic and linguistic barriers might be transcended. Thus, he decided to make one himself.

In 1887, after years of work, Zamenhof published the first outline of his "international language," which quickly captured the interest of the European intelligentsia. Though initially unnamed, Zamenhof's experiment came to be referred to as Esperanto, meaning "one who hopes" - a label he embraced. He designed the language to be as easy to learn as possible while maintaining a human level of depth and complexity, as an expression of his egalitarian, internationalist philosophy. Remarkably, Esperanto survived the tumult of 20th century European history, despite its users enduring active persecution by a number of governments, and with the advent of the Internet, the language is more widespread than ever before. Its proliferation provokes the question: how successful was Zamenhof in making a language that could shape the social environment of its users? More specifically, given the nature of Esperanto as a constructed project with a specific ideological background, is the way that it is used fundamentally shaped by the backgrounds of its speakers, or is there instead some aspect of Esperanto culture that socializes people in a unique way? Fin

After analyzing the *Tekstaro* corpus of Esperanto-language materials from 1870 into today, taking into account the existing and extensive literature surrounding the contemporary use of Esperanto, and entering into the international Esperanto community myself, I have concluded that there indeed exists an independent culture surrounding the constructed language Esperanto that socializes its users in a uniquely internationalist way, though this culture as a whole does not entirely overcome the underlying cultural norms of the places in which Esperanto is spoken. The language has been associated with a wide variety of ideologies throughout its history, but as a whole, throughout history, the Esperanto-speaking community (also known as the *Esperantujo*) has been uniquely unified, compared to other similar projects, by a shared philosophy of internationalism, which has given Esperanto an international appeal despite limitations in its design.

Philosophies of Esperanto

One of Esperanto's most defining traits in contrast to other so-called constructed languages (colloquially known as *conlangs*) is its sheer popularity, boasting millions of learners and even a community of native speakers – a unique distinction (Pereltsvaig 2017). This scale has laid the framework for the idea of a coherent "Esperanto culture" in the first place, as aforementioned; Esperanto speakers (also known as *Esperantists*) all over the world are united, at least to some extent, by a shared interest in the language and its philosophy of internationalism. Despite the community's discontiguous nature, it enjoys a wide variety of Esperanto-language books, movies, physical events, and even an opt-in homestay service, the *Pasporta Servo* ("Trovu Loĝejon | Pasporta Servo," n.d.). There are also a number of peculiarities surrounding the social environment of Esperanto, irrespective of the particular location in which it is used.

Perhaps the best example is the *interna ideo* ("internal idea"), a philosophical framework first outlined by Zamenhof as the *raison d'être* of Esperanto that continues to serve as a unifying standard for the many disparate Esperantist communities across the globe. In essence, the *interna ideo* is to "create and disseminate a common language" so as to both end war and nurture a just, benevolent, interconnected world (Fiedler 2006). As the Esperanto movement began to coalesce in the late 19th century, the *interna ideo* was, by and large, interpreted literally; as we will see throughout the rest of this paper, a number of the Esperanto's early proponents (as well as Zamenhof himself) were driven by the legitimate conviction that it would eventually become the global second language. This specific interpretation of the *interna ideo*, and ensuing vision for the Esperanto community, is known as *finvenkism* (in Esperanto, *finvenkismo*), derived from the idea of a *fina venko*, or "final victory," in which Esperanto achieved the recognition and institutional prowess its proponents sought. Unfortunately, the enduring and expanding predominance of English as a global *lingua franca* has hampered the momentum of the *finvenkist* movement, though this has also led to the emergence of ideological currents within Esperanto that reinterpret the language and its culture beyond what Zamenhof originally intended.

In 1980, at a meeting of young Esperantists in Rauma, Finland, a group of leading figures in the Esperanto community published the Rauma Manifesto, asserting that Esperanto's stated goal of becoming the world's second language was unfeasible, but that the community and culture that had coalesced around the language was worthy of preservation on its own right. "The search for our own identity," the Manifesto reads, "has led us to conceive of Esperantism as belonging to a self-selected diasporic linguistic minority" ("Esperanta Civito | Manifesto de Rauxmo," n.d.). This proposal was highly influential in the Esperanto world, and ultimately coalesced into *raumism*, an ideological current that has become dominant over the past few decades as the Esperanto community redefines itself into one increasingly defined by its non-territoriality and the shared commitment of its speakers to progressive and post-national philosophy (Gobbo 2017). Throughout the rest of this paper, I will build upon the theoretical sociolinguistic framework of language attitudes as a "symbol of social identity" to analyze the unique dynamics of Esperanto culture as transnational and voluntary and its reflection in the structural evolution of the Esperanto language.

Eurocentrism in Esperanto

Among the most common critiques of Esperanto as an "international language" is the immediately apparent European-ness of its lexicon, which seems to run contrary to its universalist philosophy. Specifically, much of Esperanto's base vocabulary is of

Romance, Slavic, and/or Germanic origin, speaking to Zamenhof's personal experience and the national origins of the language's first proponents: *esti* "to be" is rather transparently related to Spanish *estar*, as is *teamo* to English *team* and *kolbaso* ("sausage") to Russian колбаса (*kolbasa*). Esperanto's *phonology* – that is, its inventory of sounds – is awkwardly dense; additionally, it is adapted (and not very well, at that) to the inventories of the languages of Europe. Basic words such as *scii* "to know" can be incredibly tricky to pronounce consistently for Esperantists of non-European, and indeed non-Slavic, native language backgrounds. (*Scii*, for the record, is pronounced [ˈst͡si.i] – that's "s-ts-ee-ee." Such a cluster of consonants is well-suited to Polish, for example, but as you may find for yourself, the same cannot be said for an English speaker.)

Considering Esperanto's stated aim of being an *international* auxiliary language, it should ideally be as easy to learn for as many people as possible. With this in mind, having clusters of sounds that are difficult to consistently pronounce and distinguish for a large portion of the world's population, not to mention a vocabulary that is familiar for the speakers of one language group but almost entirely foreign to anyone outside that group, would impede this "mission statement;" nevertheless, both of these idiosyncrasies are present in Esperanto, a seemingly glaring design flaw for which the language is frequently criticized (Parkvall 2010; jan Misali 2017b). The following section will expand upon these criticisms, starting with Esperanto's phonology and *phonotactics* (the defined acceptable arrangements of sounds) and moving onto its lexicon, as well as analyzing the ways that the increasingly international Esperanto community has adapted to, and in some ways transcended, the language's implicit biases.

Phonology and Phonotactics

As defined by Zamenhof's original publication of Esperanto, the language distinguishes 23 distinct consonant sounds, 5 monophthongal vowel sounds, and 6 diphthongs. Organized by manner of articulation, Esperanto features the nasals /m/ and /n/; the plosives /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, and /g/; the affricates /t͡s/, /t͡ʃ/, /d͡ʒ/, and /d͡z/, though the classification of the latter as a distinct phoneme is debated (Wennergren 2023b); the fricatives /f/, /v/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /x/, and /h/; the approximants /l/ and /j/; and an alveolar trill, /r/. In terms of vowels, Esperanto features the cross-linguistically common "five-vowel system" of monophthongs – /i/, /u/, /e/, /o/, and /a/ – as well as the diphthongs /ai̯/, /oi̯/, /ui̯/, /ei̯/, /au̯/, and /eu̯/, regarded by some as vowel-consonant sequences (Pokrovskij 2014). With Esperanto's goal of maximizing accessibility in mind, several of these phonemic contrasts are problematic, in particular the /x/-/h/ distinction and the /l/-/r/ distinction.

The maintenance of a phonemic contrast between /x/ and /h/ is perhaps the most glaring misstep in Esperanto's phonological design in accordance with its stated goals, though of the two listed above, it is also effectively the least consequential. English, the most widely spoken language on the planet, does not distinguish the two sounds (with the exception of Scottish English); furthermore, French, a global language of more than 300 million speakers, has neither /x/ nor /h/ within its inventory (Hannahs 2007). This mistake, then, is not a "Eurocentric" one, per se, but a general one, in that Esperanto's phonology is immediately incompatible with two of the most widely spoken languages on Earth, both of which are, ironically, European in origin. What "reduces the blow" of this decision is that there are exceptionally few minimal pairs between /x/ and /h/ in Esperanto (the most notable example being *ĉeĥo* /tʃexo/, "a Czech person," and *ĉeko* /tʃeko/, "check") – that is to say, the functional load of the /x/-/h/ distinction is light. Indeed, the phoneme /x/ itself is relatively rare, having for the most part been supplanted by /k/ except in the case of loanwords (e.g. *ĥaoso* /xa.oso/, "chaos" → modern *kaoso* /ka.oso/ "chaos") (Gledhill 1994). Nevertheless, considering the case of French, it could be argued that the presence of /h/ at all is still an oversight, albeit not a particularly egregious one.

More problematic is the contrast between /l/ and /r/, both because of the language communities it excludes and the relative frequency with which the distinction is made. Many East Asian languages, including Korean, Japanese, and most notably Mandarin Chinese, the most widely spoken native language in the world, do not distinguish between /l/ and /r/ to the same degree that Esperanto does. Korean has one liquid phoneme, /l~ɾ/, generally realized as [l] or [ɭ] word-finally and [ɾ] intervocalically (Crosby and Dalola 2021). Similarly, Japanese has only one liquid consonant /r/, typically realized as an alveolar tap [ɾ] (Labrune 2012). Mandarin, on the other hand, has both /l/ and a rhotic /ʐ/ [ʐ ~ ɻ], but disallows syllable-final /l/ (Huang and Radant 2009). Esperanto, unfortunately, has /l/-/r/ minimal pairs that violate all of these constraints: consider *lando* "country, land" cf. *rando* "edge," *melo* "badger" cf. *mero* "-mer," and the many Esperanto words with internal *-lr-* sequences (e.g. *malrapida* "slow," *malriĉa* "poor," *malrespekta* "disrespectful").

With that last point, we enter the realm of phonotactics. Esperanto's internal rules about what sounds are allowed to follow one another, and how a syllable may be constructed, are similarly counterintuitive to the language's stated goals, even more so than the individual sounds themselves. Esperanto's syllable structure is (s/ŝ)(C)(C)V(C)(C) – in other words, a syllable may begin with an onset of up to three consecutive consonants, must have a vowel in its nucleus, and may end with up to two consonants (Oostendorp 1999). From a cross-linguistic perspective, this is unusually permissive, and it results in a large number of common Esperanto words being especially difficult to pronounce for the native speakers of many of the world's most widely spoken languages. Basic vocabulary items like *dekstren* "to the right," *instrui* "to teach," and the aforementioned *scii* "to know" are incompatible with the restrictive syllable structures of languages like Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, Yoruba, Swahili, and Tamil, thereby excluding a large portion of the world's population from comfortably pronouncing Esperanto.

As a whole, Esperanto's phonology and phonotactics are certainly "Eurocentric," though I would argue that they are more specifically "Białystokcentric," in that they by and large stem from the languages with which Zamenhof was personally familiar, especially Yiddish, Belarusian, and Polish. This explains, for example, the seemingly strange decision to include both phonemic /x/ and /h/, a distinction present in Yiddish (Kleine 2003); likewise, Esperanto's phonotactics are extremely similar to those of Belarusian (Bird and Litvin 2021). It would seem that many of Zamenhof's decisions in crafting Esperanto's sound system were driven by the mantra: "write what you know."

Esperanto's actual vocabulary, on the other hand, is more generally European (and, as I will argue, more aptly criticized for its Eurocentricity), and has also been subject to a greater degree of change over the course of Esperanto's history.

Vocabulary

As described at the beginning of this chapter, the vast majority of Esperanto's lexicon is derived from the Romance, Slavic, and Germanic branches of the Indo-European language family. In 1987, Geraldo Mattos calculated that of Esperanto's core vocabulary, 84% of terms are of Latinate origin (French, Italian, etc.); 14% of Germanic origin (English, German, etc.), and 2% of Slavic and/or Greek origin (Mattos 1987). Though small, the latter group includes many words crucial to Esperanto syntax, such as case affixes (e.g. *-n*, the accusative case suffix, from Greek) the plural suffix (*-j*, also from Greek), as well as other generally common words, like the discourse marker *nu* ("well…"), of Russian/German origin. The few words that come from non-European languages have either entered the language through European languages (e.g. *banano* "banana," ultimately from Wolof *banaana* but used in English since the 1590s) or refer to region-specific concepts (e.g. *haŝioj*, "chopsticks," from Japanese *hashi*, which itself is used alongside the coined term *manĝobastoneto*, "meal-stick") (Wikipedia 2023).

To say that Esperanto's vocabulary is "Eurocentric," then, is an understatement; it is effectively entirely European in origin. This would seem to blatantly contradict Esperanto's stated aims of being an *international* auxiliary language. It is worth noting that Zamenhof's decisions in regard to source vocabulary stem from the historical context of when, and where, Esperanto was created, in addition to Zamenhof's own linguistic background. In the late 19th century, Latin and Greek were still widely learned and used among Europe's intelligentsia, which likely factored into Zamenhof's decision to incorporate them into his own "universal language." On a personal level, having grown up in Białystok, Zamenhof spoke Russian, Yiddish, and Polish natively; in addition, he was highly proficient in German, had an intermediate understanding of Latin, French, and Hebrew, and a basic understanding of English, Greek, and Italian (Holzhaus 1969). Esperanto's truly international scope was limited by the fact that its original audience was almost entirely European.

Somehow, though, despite its blatant Eurocentricity, Esperanto is still by far and away the most widespread international auxiliary language in the world. Furthermore, some of its largest speaking communities are in China and Japan, whose predominant languages, as seen above, are structurally incongruous with Esperanto (Lins 2008). Strange as this may seem, I will argue that Esperanto's success has not necessarily been because of what it *is*, but rather what it *represents* – a borderless, international, cultural and philosophical community. First, I will discuss Esperanto's morphology and syntax, which qualify, to some extent, the idea that Esperanto's design was entirely steeped in Eurocentrism. The next few chapters will analyze the two particularly fascinating aforementioned case studies of Esperanto in China and Japan, both of which highlight the peculiarities of Esperanto and the language attitudes of its users. I will then discuss Esperanto's history as an ideological tool in Europe, a notion stemming from the philosophies of Esperanto's construction and the identities of its creator. Afterwards, I will compare Esperanto to other similar auxiliary language projects, to explain why Esperanto has, in comparison, succeeded in its goals.

Morphology

Whereas Esperanto's phonological inventory and its vocabulary are decidedly European, to the detriment of the language's stated goals, its *morphology* – that is to say, its formation of words – is more difficult to generalize. Unlike other elements of the language, Esperanto's morphology is rather unique in its design, and qualifies the idea that Esperanto is entirely Eurocentric. It is characterized by a high level of consistency (there are no "irregular verbs," for example), making the language relatively easy to learn and use in comparison its "natural" counterparts, as well as a robust assortment of *derivational affixes* (segments that can be attached to existing words to derive new vocabulary), enabling a wide range of meaning to be expressed with a small amount of basic vocabulary. These characteristics offer Esperanto speakers a considerable degree of leeway in creating and using words, and over the past century of its use, Esperantists of underrepresented linguistic backgrounds have used Esperanto's morphology as a means of asserting the language's truly international character.

To begin, Esperanto has an extremely regular system of delineating parts of speech: namely, all nouns in end *-o*, all adjectives end in *-a*, all adverbs end in *-e* (with a few exceptions), and all infinitive verbs end in *-i*. Immediately, this offers a number of possibilities, just by changing the ending letter of a root word: from the verbal root *paroli*, "to speak," we can derive *parolo* "an act of speech," *parola* "spoken," and *parole* "orally," for example. These part-of-speech endings can be compounded, too, though this is rare: *vivi* "to live," for example, can be inflected into *vivu* "live! (volitive)," from which one could further derive *vivuo* "an instance of '*vivu!*' being said" and *vivui* "to say *vivu!*" There is also an ambiguous suffix, *-aŭ*, for words with multiple grammatical functions, the vast majority of which are at least occasionally adverbial (e.g. *hodiaŭ* "today," *ambaŭ* "both," *kvazaŭ* "as if"), and can be further suffixed, if necessary, to avoid confusion (e.g. *hodiaŭe* "today (adverbial)").

Nouns are singular by default, and can be pluralized with the suffix *-j*; there is also an obligatory accusative case suffix, *-n*, that marks the direct object of an argument. Adjectives agree with their nouns in both respects; compare *bona tago* "(a) good day" with *havu bonajn tagojn!* "have nice days!" Esperanto has one definite article, *la*, which does not inflect in any way; there is no grammatical gender, nor any defined indefinite article. These distinctions, difficult as they may be for speakers of languages that lack case systems, allow Esperanto to maintain a relatively free word order, with a tendency for SVO (subject-verb-object): for example, the sentences "*la hundo kaptas pilkon*" and "*pilkon kaptas la hundo*" both mean "the dog catches a ball" ("Word Order," n.d.). Verbs in Esperanto are, similarly, entirely regular, and inflect for three tenses (past, present, and future, conveyed with the vowels *-i-*, *-a-*, and *-u-*, respectively), as well as six distinct *forms* (indicative, active and passive participles, conditional, volitive, and infinitive). This consistency enables a high degree of "freedom of expression;" as linguist and Esperantologist Sabine Fielder describes, Esperanto "assimilates structures from a variety of languages so that the same ideas can be expressed in most different linguistic structures" (Fiedler 2006).

Perhaps the most defining characteristic of Esperanto morphology is its system of derivation, which is impressively robust, highly productive, and quite unlike most of the European languages from which Esperanto sources its phonology and basic vocabulary. A cursory understanding of Esperanto's ~40 official lexical affixes enables a speaker to express a wide range of meaning with a single stem ("Esperanto Affixes" 2021). For example, from the root word *manĝi*, "to eat," one can derive *manĝigi* "to feed (someone)," *malmanĝi* "to vomit" (colloquial), *manĝaĵo* "food, meal," *manĝeto* "snack," *manĝebla* "edible," *manĝejo* "dining room," *manĝema* "hungry," *ĉion-manĝulo* "omnivore," and so on. These affixes can "stack," too: *manĝigulo*, from *manĝi* + *-igi-* (transitivizer) + *-ul-* ("one who…") could mean "feeder," just as *malmanĝejo*, from *mal-* (negation marker) + *manĝi* + *-ej-* ("place of…") could be a tongue-in-cheek translation for "vomitorium." Furthermore, the positioning of these affixes within a word is semantically significant: each affix modifies everything preceding it, which allows for even more variation in meaning. The word *arbareto*, for example, from *arbo* ("tree") + -*ar-* ("a group of…") + *-et-* (diminutive), translates to "a small forest," whereas *arbetaro* would be "a forest of small trees" (Jansen 2016). The extent and productivity of Esperanto's derivational system has made the language considerably more accessible, and thereby "international," than most "natural" languages.

This is perhaps best exemplified by Esperanto's word for "computer," which, depending on who you ask, is either *komputero*, *komputoro*, or *komputilo*. For reasons I will soon describe, the two-letter difference between these translations has been subject to fervent debate within the Esperanto community, to an extent that reflects the sociolinguistic attitudes of Esperantists towards their language project and explains its enduring popularity. Central to the conflict is the fact that there is no "original" root word in Esperanto for "computer;" after all, such technology was not exactly widespread around the time Esperanto was being designed. The three translations above thereby reflect two different "design philosophies" for the incorporation of new vocabulary into Esperanto. *Komputero* and *komputoro* are both direct loans from the English word *computer*. *Komputilo*, on the other hand, is derived from existing Esperanto vocabulary, combining the root word *komputi* "to count, to compute" with the suffix *-ilo* "thing used to…" The implications of this distinction, subtle as it may seem, are incredibly important.

Due in large part to its international composition, the Esperanto community has made a continued and conscious effort in recent years to "universalize," i.e. "de-Europeanize," the language, which has been somewhat successful. The loaning of English and/or Greco-Latin scientific vocabulary (which is "universal" for the European audience, but not so for the rest of the world) has been increasingly subsumed by internal calquing through the use of affixation, as is often the case in Mandarin (Jansen 2016). Following the above example, using *komput(e/o)ro*, a direct loan from English, assumes that English-derived scientific vocabulary is "universal" for Esperanto speakers, which, considering the popularity of Esperanto in countries like China, is obviously not the case. (The word for "computer" in Mandarin Chinese, for the record, is *diànnǎo*, a far cry from its English translation.) Using *komputilo*, on the other hand, draws upon Esperanto's existing vocabulary, thereby maintaining the language's accessibility and international appeal. Despite *komputilo*'s surface-level resemblance to the word *computer*, it requires that a Mandarin-speaking Esperantist learn only the basic root word *komputi* and the common suffix *-ilo*, rather than an entirely new word derived from English.

To examine this evolution further, I turned to the Tekstaro de Esperanto, a corpus of Esperanto texts containing more than 5,000,000 words and spanning from the 1870s into today ("Tekstaro de Esperanto," n.d.). The scale of the Tekstaro makes it an apt source for qualitative investigation of the Esperanto language and its features, as well as an avenue into deeper analysis of Esperanto literature. The corpus's structure also enables a researcher to search its entire collection for specific keywords, which I will utilize throughout the rest of this paper to illustrate the propagation (or lack thereof) of certain internationalist developments of Esperanto. The case of *komputilo* is reflected within Tekstaro's corpus in a rather pedantic fashion: every single mention of the word "computer" in Esperanto literature since 1989 has been qualified by its author with a laundry list of *all* the words for "computer" (that is to say, the three mentioned above), often accompanied by a snide reference to something along the lines of "the ongoing '*komputilo*' debate" ("Tekstaro de Esperanto," n.d.). Sardonic as it may be, this phenomenon reflects a growing trend towards internationality in the Esperanto community as its base of speakers has expanded substantially outside of Europe. Crucially, though, it is clear that these developments are not universally accepted among Esperanto's proponents.

The flexibility of the Esperanto language in terms of word derivation, together with the extent of its use despite its numerous barriers to true universality, suggest that the popularity and evolution of Esperanto come not from its position as an ideal international language but rather a shared commitment among its users, regardless of their native language backgrounds, to the language's philosophical ideals – just as purported by the Rauma Manifesto. Esperanto's popularity among people for whom its design implicitly failed to consider and its linguistic malleability in straying away from its Eurocentric origins towards a greater degree of accessibility make evident a unique social environment inherent to the *Esperantujo*.

With that said, Esperanto's morphology is not without its imperfections. For example, while the vast majority of Esperanto's derivational affixes are consistent (and thereby accessible) in their usage, the infix *-um-*, which has no set meaning, is both unpredictable and frustratingly common, to the extent that there exists an entire Wikipedia article outlining the Esperanto words that use it ("Esperanto Words with the Infix *-Um-*" 2024). Some notable examples include *brakumi* "to hug" from *brako* "arm," *komunumo* "community" from *komuna* "common," *dekstruma* "clockwise" from *dekstra* "right," and *esperantumi* "to use Esperanto and enjoy it" (Wiktionary 2020). The infix is also used in its standalone form, *umo*, as a tongue-in-cheek way to refer to an unnamed object, akin to the English "whatchamacallit." Though it is not the most egregious example of Esperanto's "missteps," the ambiguity of *-um-* is worth noting as a morphological barrier to accessibility.

More troubling, and certainly more often criticized, is the misogyny implicit to Esperanto's morphology, particularly in the case of the "feminine suffix" *-ino*. By default, Esperanto root words are *epicene* – that is to say, genderless – though they are often assumed to be masculine, and can be specified as specifically feminine with the suffix *-ino* (c.f. *bovo* "bull and/or cow of indeterminate gender" and *bovino* "(female) cow"). This is the case in many "natural" languages with grammatical gender systems (e.g. Spanish), but Zamenhof's decision to include such a distinction in Esperanto (along with the rather unfortunate resemblance of the *-ino* suffix to the diminutives of several major European languages) is perceived as unwieldy, unnecessary, and reflective of Zamenhof's own biases as well as those of the contemporary European society around him (jan Misali 2017b; Spender 1998). (To make matters worse, the *-ino* suffix is also traditionally applied to people's given names, which presents a further barrier to accessibility: a woman named Joanna, for example, would have her name customarily Esperantized as *Johanino*, rather than the more intelligible *Johana*.)

A number of proposals have arisen to reevaluate the use of gendered suffixes in Esperanto (including, interestingly enough, by Zamenhof himself, in his ultimately unsuccessful 1894 reform of Esperanto; the history of this project is discussed at length in Chapter 6). Most of them involve the incorporation of a specifically "masculine" suffix to align with the feminine *-ino* (the most popular of these being *-iĉo*, by analogy with the masculine diminutive suffix *-ĉjo*) and thereby assume a reanalysis of traditionally masculine-leaning base vocabulary as entirely gender neutral, an idea that is not uncontroversial in and of itself. None of these proposals have been accepted by the

Akademio de Esperanto, the language's most influential regulatory body, as they are perceived to violate the original intentions of Esperanto as outlined by Zamenhof's *Fundamento*, though they have seen some use in prose and poetry (Wennergren 2023a).

On the other hand, one of the most definitive evolutions made within the Esperanto community in recent years has been the incorporation of the gender-neutral pronoun *ri*, which is notable in several ways. *Ri* was coined in response to Esperanto's lack of a defined neutral third-person pronoun (equivalent to English singular *they*, for example). It was not included in Zamenhof's initial publications (he himself suggested that the pronoun *ĝi,* "it," be used in circumstances where the referent's gender is unknown), and the addition and propagation of such a basic vocabulary word, not to mention without the official endorsement of the *Akademio de Esperanto*, is extremely uncommon (Zamenhof 1907). Nevertheless, an empirical study by Esperantist Markos Kramer found that *ri* has gained considerable popularity within the past ten years, both in referring to non-binary people and as a general, non-specific pronoun. That being said, its use has been somewhat restricted to Western countries; though not tied to particular *linguistic* backgrounds, the use of *ri* appears to be based in the *cultural* backgrounds of the places in which it is used, generally correlating with areas that have seen more frequent discussions and media portrayals of non-binary gender identities (Kramer, n.d.).

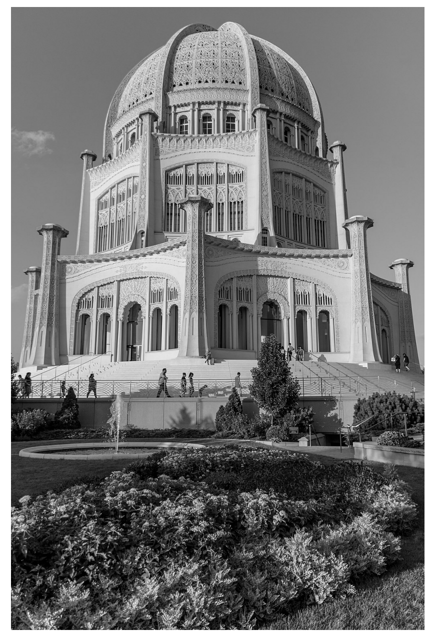
This shift, and its limitations, are similarly reflected in the literature of Esperanto, as gathered in the *Tekstaro.* There is not a single mention of the pronoun *ri* before 2012 – that said, considering the pronoun first gained widespread use around 2010, this is hardly surprising. More notable is that the use of *ri* since 2012 within the *Tekstaro's* corpus has been restricted to discussions of gender neutrality, all of which (the examples, that is, not the discussions) have originated in Western Europe, suggesting that the scope of *ri* is, as of today, limited, even within the Esperanto community itself ("Tekstaro de Esperanto," n.d.). It is nevertheless worth noting that the ascendance of *ri* at all within the Esperanto community is, on a cross-linguistic basis, significant. Across the vast majority of the world's languages, pronouns belong to what is called a *closed class*: as a part of speech, it is exceptionally rare that they receive popularly-accepted "new additions," in contrast to, say, nouns or verbs (which, especially in the case of nouns, are typically an *open class*) (Lauscher, Crowley, and Hovy 2022). The fact that *ri* has gained popular recognition and even limited use speaks to a certain degree of malleability within the sociolinguistic environment of Esperanto that is reflective of the internationalist and in large part progressive philosophy of its user base.

To some extent, the limited propagation of *riismo* qualifies the idea that Esperanto culture is entirely independent of the existing cultural norms surrounding the language's use. There is a widespread trend towards increasing universality and accessibility within the Esperanto community, and to some extent this has been successful, though it does not appear to completely trounce the larger contexts in which it is spoken. Esperanto culture is deterritorialized, but just as much as it is voluntary; therefore, the extent to which it fundamentally alters its members' perception of the world is limited by the cultural values of the societies in which they *live* – not just the ones they join out of interest. As a whole, Esperanto morphology is among the factors that have led it to stand out in comparison to other natural languages or interlanguage projects. The expressiveness enabled by Esperanto's derivational system encapsulates the internationalist philosophy that Zamenhof set out to enshrine within the language, and thereby qualifies the idea that its design is entirely flawed.

CHAPTER 2

The Bahá'í Faith

At the northern terminus of the Chicago transit system's Purple Line, in the quiet, leafy suburb of Wilmette, Illinois, is the Bahá'í House of Worship, a building so stunning as to be completely, almost comically, incongruent with its surroundings. It's one of the first places I take people from out of town, in part because getting there is an adventure in and of itself. First, you have to take the train to Linden Station, which, if you're coming from downtown, takes a good hour and a half already. Once you get there, it's easy to assume you're in the wrong place. Downtown Wilmette, with all due respect, isn't much of a "downtown," nor does it offer any particular indication that the House of Worship even exists. Passing between its parking lots and dentist offices, you'll have a fifteen minute walk through a pleasant, if unremarkable, suburban neighborhood, after which you'll find yourself in a flowery, meticulously-cultivated garden, in the middle of which sits a 200-foot-tall quartz-trimmed testament to the unity of religion.



Indeed, the relative obscurity of the House is surprising, considering the grandiosity of its architecture. The temple is adorned with a wide variety of religious symbols: the star and crescent, the Christian cross, the star of David, the Buddhist swastika, and so on. The House of Worship was built to serve the entirety of North America in the name of the Bahá'í Faith, as one of the religion's eight "continental temples," though it is open to practitioners of any and all faiths, and is very active as a multireligious house of worship. Its interior is quiet, beautiful, and imposing, yet welcoming. The intricacy and scale of the temple's design seem almost extraterrestrial. Certainly, it invites many questions. What religion would not only proudly display the symbols of others, but have the resources to make an entire monument to their varied practices?

This question skims only the surface of what makes the Bahá'í Faith so interesting. It is a movement of unique convictions with a complex and surprisingly far-reaching global history, which I will attempt to summarize in the paragraphs that follow. Its story begins with a singular figure, known by his followers as the Báb. Born in the Iranian city of Shiraz in 1819, the Báb quickly gained notoriety across the Qajar Empire for his assertion that he was a Manifestation of God (traditionally capitalized in Bahá'í writings) after a series of profound, and rather radical, revelations. The Báb's message eschewed the Islamic tradition predominant in the region and instead advocated for a religion that would progressively adapt to the world around it, in which all faiths were understood as implementations of the same message from a singular God, adapted to various times and places (Hartz 2002). He framed this message around the prophesied imminent arrival of a new messianic figure, who would finish the work that the Báb had started (Saiedi 2008). Unfortunately, the Báb did not live to see his vision completed; he was executed for apostasy in 1850 (Hartz 2002).

That figure came in the form of Bahá'u'lláh, one of the Báb's earliest followers, who had renounced his own aristocratic upbringing in the name of serving the poor. Bahá'u'lláh was among the most vocal supporters of the Báb, and as such he was one of the prime targets of the Qajar government's violent crackdown against the Babist movement. After an assassination attempt on the Qajar Shah by two Bábí youth in 1852, government ministers vowed to collectively punish the Bábís; the ensuing "reign of terror" killed at least 10,000 people and led to Bahá'u'lláh's imprisonment (Hatcher and Martin 2002). While held captive in a subterranean dungeon for months, Bahá'u'lláh had a series of mystical experiences that led him to conclude that he was the prophesied Promised One. He was eventually released, but was exiled from Qajar Persia forever, and so began a decades-long journey across the disparate territories of the Ottoman Empire, slowly coalescing the fragmented Bábí movement along the way. Bahá'u'lláh eventually settled in Baghdad, where, in 1863, he declared to his followers that he would fulfill the Báb's promise; these "two revelations" form the backbone of what is now the Bahá'í Faith (Adamson 2007; Saiedi 2008).

Today, the faith boasts millions of adherents all over the world, united in their desire to create a unified, egalitarian world order (Hatcher and Martin 2002). Unsurprisingly, given the contemporaneousness and similarities between their respective philosophies, the Bahá'í Faith and the Esperanto movement have maintained a close relationship. Among Bahá'u'lláh's provisions for the unity of humanity was the adoption of a universal second language, so that "the world may become even as one land and one home;" he felt that "as long as an international language is not adopted, complete union between the various sections of the world will be unrealized" (Nordenstorm 2015). Esperanto was the natural solution. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, son of Bahá'u'lláh and head of the Faith in the early 20th century, explicitly called for Bahá'ís to learn the language, and thought that it would "become the strongest impulse for human advancement."

Furthermore, John Esslemont, author of *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, one of the most influential Bahá'í texts, was himself an Esperantist, and consistently advocated for the language within the Bahá'í movement (Nordenstorm 2015).

That being said, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had some qualms about Esperanto. Though he held the language in high regard, and eventually unilaterally supported its propagation, he felt that "no one person can construct a Universal Language," and that its design should be led by "a Committee representing all countries" ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1982). He also felt the language was limited by its Eurocentricity, for many of the same reasons described in the previous chapter. In particular, he was not fond of the grammatical genderedness of Esperanto pronouns, both in its definitive un-egalitarianism ('Abdu'l-Bahá and his father were both keen on women's emancipation and gender equality as a cornerstone of Bahá'í doctrine) and, perhaps, its contradiction with Persian, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's native tongue, which makes no such grammatical distinction (Nordenstorm 2015). It was only after Esperanto became unquestionably predominant as the world's leading constructed auxiliary language (as opposed to other similar projects, such as Ido – more on that later) that 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave it his unequivocal support.

The very idea of Esperanto, an auxiliary language designed to facilitate peace between linguistically disparate groups of people, goes hand-in-hand with the Bahá'í mission statement. It should be noted, though, that the Esperanto movement and the Bahá'í Faith share some ideological currents beyond Esperanto itself. While refining his "international language," Zamenhof also developed the philosophy of *homaranismo* (in English, Humanitism), based partly on the maxims of the Jewish religious leader Hillel the Elder. Like Bahá'í, Zamenhof's Humanitism emphasized the universal kinship of humanity, centering on the doctrine of the Golden Rule: "Treat others as you would like to be treated." Whereas Esperanto was Zamenhof's linguistic mechanism for uniting the world, Humanitism was its philosophical extension (Privat 1980). The use of Esperanto within the Bahá'í Faith was to some degree a matter of practicality, in that the Bahá'í Faith's search for a universal language coincided with the rise of, well, a universal language; that said, its ongoing momentum within the Faith has been driven by the two movements' shared philosophies, as I will reinforce throughout the rest of this thesis.

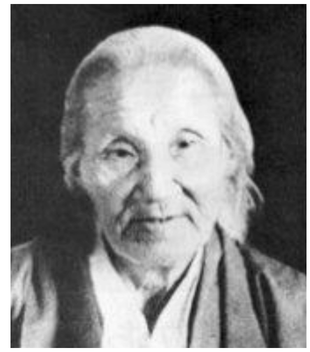
Since its inception, Esperanto has played a varying, yet ever-present, role in the Bahá'í Faith, as both movements have spread out of their initially regional spheres of influence to become truly global phenomena. Many prominent Bahá'ís have been prominent Esperantists, and vice versa: this includes Agnes Alexander, early proponent of both Bahá'í and Esperanto in Japan (more on her later); James Ferdinand Morton Jr., Boston-area political activist and vice-president of the U.S. branch of the Universal Esperanto Association; and even Lidia Zamenhof, daughter of Dr. Zamenhof, who spread Esperanto, Bahá'í, and Humanitism in the United States in the 1930s (Nordenstorm 2015). Furthermore, both Bahá'í and Esperanto are inextricably intertwined with the global political history of the 20th century, and particularly the history of the anarchist movement. In many parts of the world, particularly Europe and East Asia, the two initiatives have been conduits for organized left-wing resistance, the details of which will be dissected further in the following chapters.

This suggests that Esperanto's popularity has not been because of, but rather in *spite* of, its Eurocentric design. Certainly, from a design standpoint, Esperanto is far from the "ideal" global auxiliary language; it is nevertheless inseparable from the philosophical and political currents within which it was created, and, indeed, the vision of the future of humanity that it represents. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, for example, recognized Esperanto's flaws, but he understood the language not just as the sum of its phonological and morphological components, but as an ever-evolving philosophical community, by far and away the most robust example of its time. It is no coincidence that, as we delve into more regionally specific histories of Esperanto, the Bahá'í movement resurfaces time and time again.

CHAPTER 3

Esperanto in East Asia

Ōmoto and the Dichotomy of Esperanto



In 1837, Nao Deguchi was born in the town of Fukuchiyama, near Kyoto, Japan, into difficult circumstances. The surrounding region was mired in famine, and Nao's parents nearly decided to abandon her; though they were eventually persuaded against the decision, her father died of cholera shortly after (Deguchi 1995). Nao was eventually adopted by the Deguchi family, who married her to their adopted son, Masagoro; the family lived in poverty for decades until Masagoro's untimely death in 1887 (Amis 2015). It was not until 1892, at the age of 55, that Nao would become one of the most influential spiritual leaders in Japanese history.

So the story goes, Nao was possessed by a spirit, *Ushitara no Konjin*, who foretold that the world was soon to end. The spirit conveyed its prophecies *through* Nao, which led to her arrest; during her imprisonment, the spirit commanded Nao to inscribe its teachings in the form of more than 200,000 pages of prophecies (*ofudesaki*). After her release, she met a religious teacher named Deguchi Onisaburō (*né* Ueda Kisaburō; he changed his name after marrying Nao's daughter), who helped Nao arrange her *ofudesaki* into scripture; this became the basis for a new religion, which eventually came to be known as *Ōmoto* – the "great origin" (Amis 2015). Ōmoto has ebbed and flowed in popularity since, but is still, as is tradition, led by the women of the Deguchi family (Tamura and Hunter 2000). The religion's doctrine synthesizes *Ko-Shintō* belief (the predecessor of contemporary Shintō) with core tenets of multifaith dialogue and universalism, as well as 19th century *kokugaku* scholarship, which advocated for the cleansing of the "Japanese spirit" of foreign influence, especially that of China (Earl 1964).

One particularly notable aspect of Ōmoto is the specific doctrine of *izu-mizu*, the framing of reality through dichotomies: between fire and water, male and female, Nao and Onisaburō, Japan and the rest of the world, and so on. Central to the latter is Ōmoto's exaltation of Esperanto. Many of the religion's promotional materials are published in the language, in addition to Ōmoto's official motto: *Unu Dio, Unu mondo, Unu Interlingvo* ("One God, one world, one Interlanguage." Esperanto has been present in Ōmoto practice since the 1920s, when Onisaburō was convinced to incorporate it after dialoguing with a group of Bahá'í; the language has since become, as religious scholar and Esperantist Joel Amis puts it, one of the "defining aspects of Ōmoto's internationalism" (Amis 2015). At first, this might seem contradictory; after all, Ōmoto is hardly "pro-Europe," and indeed its universalist character is fundamentally shaped by its conception of Japan as the center of the world. Onisaburō himself claimed that Japan was the first country created by the gods, and that every other continent was made in Japan's image: Eurasia was "our Honshu" (Japan's largest island), Africa "our Kyushu," South America "our Taiwan" (a Japanese colony at the time), and so on (Miura 2019). Why, then, would this religious movement, so concerned with the pureness of Japan, advocate for the use of an auxiliary language modeled on the languages of Europe, with a phonology and lexicon almost entirely incompatible with those of Japanese?

The immediate answer would be "because Onisaburō liked Esperanto," which, though only a surface-level understanding of the language's significance in Ōmoto, is not incorrect. Onisaburō did have a personal interest in Esperanto; tellingly, throughout his leadership he steered the Ōmoto movement towards an emphasis on universalism, rather than Japanese cultural nationalism. This was foretold, to a degree, by his own background: in 1898, at his own low point, mired in heavy drinking and his late father's debts, he was beaten to the point of unconsciousness, but, by his own recollection, was rescued by a man dressed in Western clothing who invited him on a spiritual journey of asceticism. This anecdote, and Onisaburō's framing of it, suggests that he was open to Western influence in a way that most of Ōmoto's early practitioners were not, which extended to his Esperantist proclivities (Stalker 2008; Amis 2015). This stands in stark contrast to Nao's original vision of Ōmoto, in which silk, tobacco, vaccinations, Confucianism, Buddhism, and even Chinese-based *kanji* characters were deemed as "foreign intrusions" into the Japanese way of life (Amis 2015).

Onisaburō explicitly enshrined Esperanto within Ōmoto scripture in 1923, five years after Nao's death. He understood it to be God's means of "renewing the world" through an accessible, universal language. That being said, beyond its spiritual significance, there was a practical element to the adoption of Esperanto as well, in that it serviced Onisaburō's interests of expanding the Ōmoto movement through missionary work. Over the course of the early 20th century, Ōmoto's messaging gradually shifted towards the international, making a conscious effort to appeal to a global audience. Onisaburō believed that Esperanto really would become the world's "universal second language" by as early as 1933; thus, explicitly incorporating the language into Ōmoto doctrine would "facilitate the realization of the divine plan" (Amis 2015). Early publications of Ōmoto's official Esperanto-language magazine, *Oomoto*, are both explicitly messianic and remarkably Christian in their messaging, referring to Onisaburō as "the divine man, having the nail markings of Christ on both palms," and remarking that it is the "belief of all humanity" that "Christ will be reborn in this world" (Amis 2015). As Onisaburō sought to broaden Ōmoto's appeal beyond Japan, Esperanto was both a spiritual and practical tool for his universalist vision.

In the decades since World War II, Ōmoto has gradually shifted away from Onisaburō's expansionist goals into more of a "window" of traditional Japanese culture, with Esperanto as an intermediary. The religion's contemporary publications (still written in Esperanto) focus more on the Ōmoto perspective on current events, its teachings, arts and culture, and advocacy around broader global issues like nuclear disarmament and sustainable agriculture, albeit without Onisaburō's pre-war messianic messaging (Amis 2015). Despite abandoning its previous *finvenkism*, Ōmoto still maintains a very active role in the worldwide Esperanto movement. Its centers in Japan typically offer Esperanto courses, and the language bookends official speeches; additionally, Ōmoto practitioners are a staple at the annual World Esperanto Congress, where their presentations enjoy quite a bit of popularity, as they are many Esperantists' "first and only direct encounter with traditional Japanese culture" (Amis 2015).

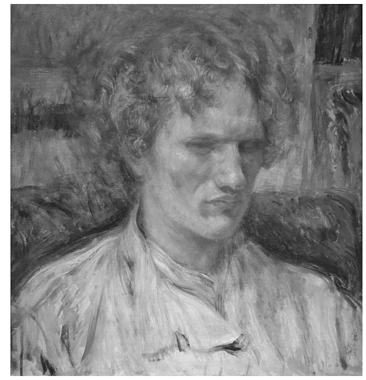
Ōmoto is far from the only implementation of Esperanto in Japan, nor is it the most historically significant. In fact, as will become quickly apparent, the Japanese Esperanto movement is a deeply multifaceted one, intricately tied to both the history of Japan, and, ultimately, that of the entire world. I use Ōmoto as an introduction (or, perhaps, a "great origin?") into the broader history of Japanese Esperantism because it exemplifies the philosophical significance of Esperanto within Japanese social movements. Just as in the Bahá'í Faith, Esperanto is enshrined within Ōmoto not necessarily for what it *is*, but for what it *represents*. As Japan became more and more politically and culturally globalized over the course of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Esperanto was a medium through which its adherents in Japan "sited" their country "within a wider vision of world culture and civilization" (Rapley 2015).

Proletarian Esperantism in Japan

The turn of the 20th century was, to say the least, a turbulent time for Japan. In the wake of intensifying challenges to the country's centuries-strong policy of isolationism, a group of politicians, many of them advisors to Emperor Mutsuhito, chose to re-consolidate the imperial political system, aiming to strengthen Japan against the looming threat of colonization. This decision came to be known as the Meiji Restoration, and its enduring political and societal significance within Japan cannot be understated. Tellingly, Mutsuhito himself is today more commonly known as Emperor Meiji, a posthumous title that refers to his role in the eponymous Restoration – not the other way around.

The decades following the Restoration are known as the Meiji Era, and were characterized by rapid industrialization and military growth; a cultural shift away from Japan's neighbors in East Asia and towards the West; and, concurrently, the initial inklings of Japan's colonial empire. After a series of military victories against China (in the First Sino-Japanese War) and Russia (in the Russo-Japanese War) solidified Japan's status as a military great power, Japanese society reckoned with its place in the world, and in particular its relationship to the West, creating the perfect environment for the diffusion of Esperanto. Beyond, obviously, an interest in Esperanto, few generalizations can be made about Japan's initial Esperantist community; it was remarkably diverse in all respects, including philosophy, political ideology, and background (Rapley 2015). Throughout the Meiji Era and especially post-World War I, and in many instances guided by the Bahá'í Faith, the Japanese Esperanto movement evolved both in tandem with and away from European Esperantism to become a lasting political and cultural presence, uniquely shaped by Japan's bourgeoning presence in an increasingly interconnected world system.

The multifariousness of Japan's Esperanto community is perhaps best exemplified by one of its central figures, Vasili Eroshenko. Eroshenko was born in 1890, in a rural village in Russia, and after contracting measles at age 4, was left permanently blind. Around the age of 20, he became involved with the Esperanto movement, which led him first to London and eventually to Tokyo, where he began working as a masseur and Esperanto teacher. Eroshenko remained in Tokyo for two years, during which time he became not only one of the most active proponents of Esperanto in Japan, but a prominent ally of the regional Bahá'í movement (and especially of Agnes Alexander; see page 15) as well as the Shinjinkai, a left-wing student organization (Smith 1970; Rapley 2015). After another brief period of travel, Eroshenko again returned to Japan, and established himself as a popular writer of Japanese children's fiction, before eventually



being deported in 1921 for his ties to the socialist movement. He founded several schools for the blind across Myanmar and Central Asia, and eventually returned to his hometown in Russia, where he passed away in 1952 (Kuplowsky 2023).

Among Eroshenko's closest associates was Japanese playwright Akita Ujaku, who began learning Esperanto after meeting Eroshenko and eventually became a leader of Japanese proletarian Esperantism. During a 1927 trip to the Soviet Union to celebrate the 10-year anniversary of the October Revolution, Akita struggled with the language barrier, but eventually came to rely on his knowledge of Esperanto for "smaller scale personal encounters," which "gave him a window on the Soviet experiment" (Rapley 2015). He believed that Japan's Esperanto movement had a uniquely strong progressive tendency, and after returning to Japan, helped found the left-wing *Japana Prolet-Esperantista Unio* (JPEU), which was eventually shut down by the state (Essertier 2019).

Other activists similarly took to the use of Esperanto as a means of propagating proletarian solidarity. Ōsugi Sakae began to study Esperanto in 1906 while in prison for a trolley-fare demonstration; upon release, he was extremely active in Japan's Esperantist and anarchist movements, and had a profound influence on the language's progressive community in both Japan and China (Stanley 1982; Rapley 2015). Similarly, Esperantist Teru Hasegawa, after being arrested for her proletarian activities in Japan, moved to China, where she became one of the most vocal leaders of the Japanese opposition against the country's invasion and occupation of Manchuria (Essertier 2019). As historian and professor Sho Konishi describes, “Japanese Esperantism was a popular practice that uprooted the seminal place of language in the nation-state's project to adopt Western modernity” (Konishi 2013).

Esperanto and Japan in the World

Throughout the 1920s, Esperantists in Japan began to diverge into two major camps. The left-wing movement, exemplified by Akita, Sakae and Hasegawa, advocated for Esperanto as a mechanism of proletarian liberation; meanwhile, the “mainstream” movement initially sought to preserve a perceived sense of ideological neutrality within Esperanto, but, for the sake of preservation, gradually began to assert the language as a tool of Japanese nationalism, using it as a bridge to portray the supposed virtue of Japanese culture, justify Japan’s invasion of Manchuria, and assert the country’s soft power to European audience. This split came to a head in the 1930s, as the Japanese state began to actively crack down on left-wing Esperantism across the country, and many of the movement’s leaders were either arrested, deported, or assassinated (Rapley 2015; Lins 2008).

Whereas the left wing rallied behind a *philosophical* understanding of Esperanto, as a language that could unite linguistically and culturally disparate groups towards the goal of a classless society (as Konishi describes), the “mainstream” (admittedly an ideologically diverse group in and of itself) was united by a *practical* understanding of Esperanto, as a tool through which Japan could assert its legitimacy as a colonial power in a European-dominated world stage. Tellingly, many of Japan’s representatives at the

League of Nations were themselves Esperantists, and were key advocates of the language's institutionalization at the level of global diplomacy. Political scientist Nitobe Inazō, for example, was the deputy secretary general of the League, and was its official delegate at the 13th World Congress of Esperanto in 1921. He later delivered a report to the League's General Assembly, outlining the history of language and advocating for its implementation. About the broader Esperanto community, he said:

> A very common remark is that they are hobbyists, cranks, unbalanced zealots, etc. – criticism cast on all pioneers of new enterprises. It was told [to] me that among the one often finds persons with peculiar scruples, or what we may call queer, e.g. strong teetotalers, vegetarians, religious fanatics, etc. I felt I could verify this statement – not, however, to their discredit, but rather in their favour. It is only to be that idealism and independence of mind should manifest themselves in ways divergent from the beaten tracks of the every-day world.

As for the language itself, Nitobe remarked that:

> Of the ease with which it can be mastered, compared with natural languages, there is no doubt, as has been testified by experience and experiments. With those who are specially endowed with the gift of tongues, it is no exaggeration to say that it is a matter of a few hours to be able to read Esperanto (Nitobe 1921).

Throughout the report, Nitobe stresses the practical need for an international language of diplomacy and commerce. He cites previous measures to elevate Spanish, Italian, and Norwegian to this position, and emphasizes that all of those initiatives have failed to gain momentum because, by virtue of being "natural" languages, they inherently give "special treatment" to their country of origin. Furthermore, within the League itself, argues Nitobe, the contemporary predominance of French and English as the *de facto* languages of diplomacy "places a heavy handicap on some nations and thus evokes a question of justice." Interestingly, he elaborates:

> This grave handicap cannot be radically overcome by the mere adoption of an auxiliary language, which would probably be based on Western (European) linguistic systems without any reference to those of the Orient. I do not believe, however, that the Orient will raise any objection on this score.

Nitobe was conscious of Esperanto's European bias; ultimately, he understood that it was not the perfect international auxiliary language, but, compared to its alternatives, it was certainly good enough. Considering the enduring popularity of Esperanto in East Asia, it would seem that Nitobe was right.

The exigency of Nitobe's proposal was corroborated by the experience of other Japanese bureaucrats, who similarly found Esperanto promising as a diplomatic intermediary. Philosopher Chikao Fujisawa, for example, attempted to get official recognition for the use of Esperanto in education, though was ultimately unsuccessful. Similarly, author Kunio Yanagita, who served on the League's Permanent Mandates Commission and, like Akita, struggled with the language barrier in the League, advocated for Esperanto as "a means of allowing less traditional diplomatic powerhouses to participate more effectively in the new international relations" (Rapley 2015). Esperanto was one of the means through which Japanese bureaucrats sought entry into spheres of influence from which they had previously been isolated.

Interestingly, as Japan entered into these archetypically European diplomatic spaces, the country was simultaneously experiencing a re-examination, and in some ways revitalization, of Japanese cultural identity. The aforementioned Kunio Yanagita was most prominent not as a diplomat, but as a folklorist, who spent many years conducting anthropological studies of regional Japanese oral traditions and customs. In fact, he is often heralded as "the father of *minzokugaku*," the academic study of Japanese folk traditions (Mori 1980). Though Kunio's embrace of Esperanto, a language "intentionally dehydrated" of national attachment, and *minzokugaku*, a field of study deeply concerned with Japanese national identity, may seem contradictory, it is consistent with a broader contemporary intellectual movement in Japan that reconciled the country's national identity with its place in an increasingly globalized world. Anthropologist Tsuboi Shōgorō, for example, embraced the idea of an ethnically heterogeneous Japan, but specifically as a means of justifying the country's ongoing imperialist expansion (Oguma 2002; Konishi 2013). This attitude was applied, for example, in the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo, where Esperanto was propagandistically synthesized with *hakkō ichiu*, the ideological slogan asserting Japan's right to rule over "all eight corners of the world" (Hudziyeva 2023). This is not to say that Kunio himself shared the *hakkō ichiu* position, but rather to clarify that the Esperantist and internationalist movements in Japan were not universally centered around post-national proletarian liberation.

This dichotomy may seem familiar; it is, I would argue, the political manifestation of Ōmoto's spiritual doctrine, which developed contemporaneously with the diffusion of Esperanto and Japan's activity at the League of Nations. Again, I should clarify that Ōmoto neither was nor is representative of Japanese society as a whole – even at the heights of its popularity, it has always been a minority religious movement – but it exemplifies the dual interpretations of Esperanto and its significance that prevailed throughout Japan in the decades leading up to World War II. For some, Esperanto was the keystone of an egalitarian post-national future; for others, it was a means of asserting Japanese culture to a broader, usually European, audience. Ōmoto, in its Japan-centered universalism, asserts both Esperantisms, and thereby illustrates the unique duality of the Japanese Esperanto movement.

For the record, Nitobe's League of Nations proposal came extremely close to succeeding: it was ratified by ten of the League's eleven delegates, but vetoed by a singular dissenter, France's Gabriel Hanotaux, the implications of which will be examined in Chapter 4. Unfortunately, both Nitobe's international and domestic advocacy (though he supported Japan's integration into the world system, he was staunchly anti-war) was for naught, as Japan launched into imperial global war in the late 1930s. World War II entailed a dramatic curtailment of Esperanto, whose progressive and internationalist proclivities threatened the totalitarian expansionism of Japan's wartime government; nevertheless, the use of the language persisted as a tool of Japan's anti-war movement, exemplified by the aforementioned Teru Hasegawa as well as pacifist leader and Esperantist Osamu Ishiga (Kamimura 2023). The use of Esperanto bounced back, to some extent, in the postwar era – in fact, by 1964, Japan had the largest (registered) Esperanto community outside of Europe – but, given the ever-shrinking possibility of *finvenkismo* on one hand and the nebulousness of Japanese nationalism on the other, the ideological place of Esperanto was relegated to more of a discursive tool and forum for inter-group dialogue than, for example, a proletarian unifier, international legitimacy, or justification for imperial conquest (Forster 1982; Kimura and Hitosi 2022).

This diminished position of Esperanto in Japan has largely persisted into today. Though the language still enjoys a healthy level of popularity among hobbyists, activists, linguists, and specialized groups like Ōmoto, the "stakes" of Japan's Esperanto movement, nor its ambitions, are not nearly as high as they were in the 1920s. Nevertheless, the history, and in particular the ideological extensiveness, of Esperanto in Japan is crucial to understanding why exactly Esperanto has managed to succeed despite its flawed design. Esperanto did not exist in a vacuum when it came to Japan; in fact, the duality of its internationalist philosophy and Eurocentric structure allowed it to appeal to a wide variety of groups, who saw Esperanto as a means to either envision a post-national future or assert Japan's place in a hitherto European-dominated global imperialist system.

Esperanto and Anarchism in China

Just as Esperanto took hold in Japan, the language's ease of learning, internationalist character, and potential as a tool of proletarian resistance resonated even stronger in China. At the beginning of the twentieth century, China's anarchist movement was starting to coalesce. After years of demonstrations, revolts, and collective action against famine, autocracy, and concessions to Japan and European colonial powers, the 1911 Xinhai Revolution deposed the ruling Qing Dynasty, ending more than 2,000 years of imperial rule (Li 2007). In the wake of complete structural upheaval, revolutionary thinkers like Jing Meijiu proposed new frameworks of social organization. Jing was a journalist by trade, and he cultivated a "broader audience for anarchist thought" through *Xuehui*, a left-wing journal that he published starting in 1922 (Müller-Saini and Benton 2006). Not only did *Xuehui* give voice to a number of anarchist authors (including the aforementioned Ōsugi Sakae), it also played a major role in the publicization of Esperanto in China; for reasons I will outline below, this is no coincidence.

Esperanto had taken a foothold in China around the turn of the century, when it was introduced to the country by both Russian merchants passing through the northeast and Chinese students returning from Japan, France, and Britain. The language gained institutional backing in the immediate wake of the Xinhai Revolution, when Cai Yuanpei, Minister of Education of the new Republic of China, ordered Esperanto to be included as an elective course in all teacher training institutes (Chan 1986). A major boon to the movement occurred in 1922, when Cai invited the aforementioned Vasily Eroshenko, who had just been expelled from Japan for his supposed "Bolshevism," to teach Esperanto at Beijing University. Eroshenko's course proved to be quite popular, eventually amassing more than 500 students; concurrently, other prominent Esperantists in China began to write about him and translate his works, giving further recognition to Esperanto and its ideals (Chan 1986; Müller-Saini and Benton 2006).

Because of its internationalist philosophy and relative ease of learning, Esperanto quickly began to gain credence within the Chinese anarchist community, even despite the aforementioned structural and lexical differences between Esperanto and China's most widely spoken languages. Hu Yuzhi, publisher of prominent magazine *Dongfang zazhi*, advocated for Esperanto as "the solution to the problem of international communication and Chinese isolation;" the language was ideal as a means of communication between peoples, said Hu, because even though it had far fewer speakers than Mandarin Chinese, it was not tied to any nation in particular, and was easier for foreigners to learn. Meanwhile, Ou Shengbai and Huang Zunsheng, both contributors to *Dongfang zazhi* and themselves prominent Esperantist anarchists, spearheaded a League of Nations proposal to found a translation committee, allowing countries to translate scientific discoveries into Esperanto and make them internationally accessible (Müller-Saini and Benton 2006). Esperanto encapsulated many of the ideological and practical goals of Chinese anarchism, both in its envisioning of a post-nationalist, post-racist global society and, more immediately, the entrance of China into traditionally European-dominated discursive spaces. As professor and scholar of Chinese history Gregor Benton puts it:

> What did China's Esperantists hope to achieve? For most, Esperanto was a badge of internationalist commitment and belief. For some, it was a universal key to the 'west' that would spare China the need to engage separately with each western culture and language… Esperanto was a vacuum filled with ever-changing ideals – but this further sapped its strength, for it came to be identified with sectarianism and quixotry (Benton 2007).

Indeed, as Esperanto continued to gain popularity in China throughout the 1920s into the 1930s, its position began to shift: initially, it was strongly associated with the anarchist movement in particular, but the language developed into more of a pragmatic tool of popular resistance against Japanese imperialism. This shift is reflected in the rhetoric surrounding Esperanto and its philosophy during this period. In 1927, the magazine *Geming zhoubao* ("Revolutionary Weekly"), an anarchist and explicitly anti-state-communist publication (to the extent that it affiliated itself with Chiang Kai-Shek's Guomintang) celebrated Esperanto as the forefront of China's "spiritual revolution," and claimed that the language's philosophy supported an "anarcho-communist society… against nationalism[,] militarism [and] class dictatorship" (Müller-Saini and Benton 2006). The following year, *Geming zhoubao* was, ironically, banned by the Guomintang, as part of their large-scale crackdown on the anarchist movement in response to what they perceived to be the "degeneration of the revolution;" concurrently, Esperanto schools were made to teach courses in Guomintang party ideology, and the Esperantist institutions that remained began to distance themselves from anarchism in order to survive (Dirlik 1991).

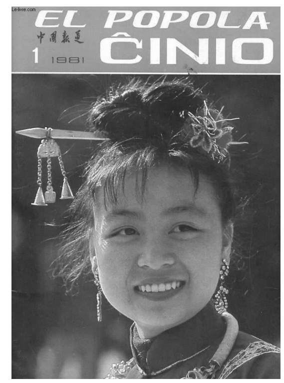
Esperanto in the People's Republic of China

It was not until 1932, after Japanese forces attacked Shanghai, that Esperanto started to attract substantial interest from within the Chinese Communist Party. The language served the burgeoning Party as a means of resistance against both the Guomintang and, more pertinently, Japan. Esperanto's "internationalist character" was framed as a bastion of progressive ideals and proletarian unity, exemplified in such slogans as "*per Esperanto por la liberigo de Ĉinio*" ("the liberation of China through Esperanto"); this was featured in a number of Esperantist books and journals throughout the 1930s that depicted the revolutionary movement in China and the country's resistance to Japanese imperial occupation. These publications garnered international support for the Chinese cause, cementing Esperanto's role as a "bridge" between China and the West (Chan 1986; Müller-Saini and Benton 2006). Furthermore, many Chinese Esperantists became involved around this time in the movement to "latinize" Mandarin Chinese, paralleling a similar process that had occurred within the Chinese minority of the Soviet Union; not only did this strengthen the network between the Chinese and Soviet Esperantist communities (the latter of which will be explored further in the following chapter), it laid the groundwork for what would become Hanyu Pinyin, the Standard

Chinese romanization system developed and circulated in China in the 1950s (Riedlinger 1989).

After World War II, the Chinese Communist Party became institutionalized within the new People's Republic of China, and in the absence of a singular opposing force, its support of Esperanto as an ideological instrument began to wane. The language saw some use by the government during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, but the Chinese Esperanto movement itself largely came to a halt, as many of its leading figures were imprisoned. This changed, rather dramatically, in the late 1970s, when the movement began to flourish again: in fact, by 1986, the country had around 400,000 Esperanto speakers (compared to around 1,000 a decade earlier), the language was taught in universities across the nation, and China was "acknowledged to be the most active country in the world in the promotion of Esperanto" (Chan 1986; He and Wu 2023). This shift occurred for several reasons. One was an active effort on the part of the Universal Esperanto Association to expand the Esperanto movement in China and establish a better relationship with the Chinese Esperanto League, exemplified by the election of noted Chinese anarchist, translator, and Esperantist Ba Jin to the UEA's Honorary Committee of Patrons in 1981. The UEA recognized that China's large population would make a substantial impact on the international Esperanto movement if the language were to gain a foothold there (Zhu 1983). Another factor was political: the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, and the subsequent end of the Cultural Revolution, led to warmer foreign relations with many of the Western countries where Esperanto was well-established (Zhao 2022).

At the intersection of these points is, once again, the international potential of Esperanto itself. Within China, Esperanto came to be seen as a means of projecting the country's image abroad. This understanding motivated Radio Beijing, a network owned by the Chinese government, to begin broadcasting in Esperanto in the 1960s, and eventually expand their international coverage considerably into the 1980s. As with the Ōmoto movement in Japan, Radio Beijing used Esperanto as a means of showcasing China's "history, geography, and culture" to an international audience; a similar effort was undertaken by *El Popola Ĉinio*, a widely-circulated and nationally syndicated Chinese Esperanto magazine. Both Radio Beijing and *EPĈ* were initially primarily ideological in character, being used to promulgate China's socialist project, but after 1976, these media shifted in focus to, first and foremost, coverage of the domestic and international Esperanto movement (Chan 1986). Once again, Esperanto was understood pragmatically, as a linkage between China and the international community within which it was spoken.



Unfortunately, but tellingly, the momentum of the Esperanto movement has depleted considerably in China as well, having largely been supplanted by English after that language's incorporation into the state education system (Bolton and Graddol 2012). Today, of all Chinese institutions of higher education, only Zaozhuang University still offers an Esperanto major, which at the start of 2023 enrolled 24 students – but this group, too, took a hit later that year, after a popular Chinese education influencer publicly ridiculed the program for its "uselessness," leading nine of those 24 students to quit (He and Wu 2023). As in Japan, the Esperanto movement is certainly still alive in China, but its position is a far cry from its peak in the 1980s. Nevertheless, the history of Esperanto is woefully incomplete without an understanding of the Chinese Esperanto movement.

In both Japan and China, Esperanto has transcended linguistic barriers to become an ideological force, utilized by a wide variety of actors in a wide variety of ways. The language's popularity in East Asia challenges the idea that Esperanto's Eurocentric design flaws inhibit its success. Rather, it suggests that Esperanto has managed to gain popularity because of a combination of its internationalist philosophy and being at least *easier* to learn than other natural languages, both of which have allowed the language to spread as an instrument of proletarian movements and nationalist cross-country linkages alike. The eschewing of Esperanto in favor of English in modern-day China further suggests that, as Gotelind Müller and Gregor Benton claim, "the welfare of Chinese Esperantism was always tied to political factors, whether the Esperantists wanted it or not" (Müller-Saini and Benton 2006).

CHAPTER 4

Esperanto in Europe

A Trip to Toulouse

I have always maintained that there is no better way of understanding the social intricacies of a language community than to be immersed within it. It is with this in mind that I found myself, on a foggy morning in March, at the Esperanto Cultural Centre in Toulouse, France, situated in the quaint residential borough of Empalot. The Centre occupies a few rooms of the *Maison des Associations* – the "clubhouse" (though without the juvenile connotations of the English term) which seemed to be a center of activity for the neighborhood, not to mention the oldest structure in its vicinity by at least a century. I figured, presumptuously, that I would just walk in on the Esperantists and see what they were up to that day. In my timid French, I asked the attendant at the front counter if she happened to know where the *réunion de l'Espéranto* happened to be meeting; to my delight, she told me I was in the right place, and sent me upstairs. At last, I would be face-to-face with a real, tangible Esperanto community – I couldn't believe it!

I realized, after knocking at the door, that my presumption was somewhat misguided. I was greeted not by a grand auditorium, nor a trilingual Esperanto-French-English visitors' kiosk, as I might have hoped, but rather by the baffled stares of four people, all around my age, at their computers, looking incredibly busy. I came to find that I had put them all in a difficult position. As it turned out, early March was actually by far their most active time of year, because the following week was "Esperanto Week" in Toulouse(!); one member jokingly told me it was a shame I had come during "the one week they actually had something to do." Nevertheless, for at least a few of the Esperantists, the sheer novelty of a random American university student walking in on their (for all intents and purposes) private meeting superseded the urgency of their schedule, and, as such, they generously indulged my curiosity.

Immediately upon sitting down, I found just how seriously the Esperantists took their craft, as one of them asked me: *Kafo aŭ teo*? Just as I realized that his request was actually in Esperanto, he sensed my confusion, and repeated, a little disappointed, in English: “Coffee or tea?” *Mi estas bona*, *dankon*, I replied, putting to use the few stock phrases I had collected over the past few months. He nodded, and offered the same to his colleague across the table, who responded in kind, and then launched into a lengthy anecdote about something from their shared Slack group chat, an email they had received from the university, and the weather that day, and, yes, all of it entirely in Esperanto. I was well and truly in over my head.

To make matters worse, attempting to communicate with the Esperantists would mean breaking the cardinal rule of their language: “*Ne krokodilu!*” Among the notable aspects of Esperanto communication is that, compared to most other languages, code-switching – that is to say, shifting between two different languages (or varieties of the same language) within a conversation – is rare, and indeed for the most part actively avoided by Esperanto speakers, as observed by pragmaticist Sabine Fiedler (Fiedler 2018). There is a strong social pressure within Esperantist spaces to speak only Esperanto as much as possible, both for inclusivity’s sake (Esperanto is the language that attendees are most certain to have in common, after all) as well as in the interest of keeping the language alive (Okrent 2006). With this in mind, the Esperanto verb *krokodili* carries a pejorative tone: it means “to speak in one’s own native language among Esperantists.”

Those who commit such a faux pas welcome scolds of "*Ne krokodilu!*" ("no crocodile-ing!") (Okrent 2010).

Curiously, this attitude and its permeance suggest a parallel between Esperanto and marginalized natural languages (*natural* in this context meaning non-constructed, i.e. developed unconsciously, as with the vast majority of the world's languages). Linguist Laura Ahearn makes the specific connection between Esperanto and Navajo in the realm of language acquisition; though Navajo is a natural language, its speakers have, broadly speaking, adopted far fewer loanwords from other languages than have speakers of English or Spanish, for example - just like Esperanto. Ahearn argues that Navajo and Esperanto speakers are put "on the defensive" because of the perceived cultural and linguistic dominance of exterior influence (in both cases, usually by English), and thereby incentivized to "preserve" their languages as much as possible, ergo eschewing loanwords – the substantially different historical contexts surrounding these two languages and their relationship to English notwithstanding (Ahearn 2012).

The above examples illustrate the significance of *language attitudes*, a concept central to sociolinguistic theory and one that will frame the rest of my discussion of Esperanto and its community. As defined by linguistic scholar Marko Dragojevic, the perception of a language by its speakers (in other words, their *attitude*) is reflective of two evaluative dimensions: socioeconomic status and in-group solidarity, the latter of which is particularly relevant in the case of Esperanto. Language itself is, as Dragojevic explains, a "symbol of social identity," and the use of a nonstandard language variety is an important signifier of in-group identity (Dragojevic 2017). Esperanto, in lacking any official recognition at the national or subnational level, is inherently "nonstandard" everywhere that it is spoken, and its use is thereby reflective of membership in an Esperantist in-group with its own social and philosophical expectations.

This theoretical framework further contextualizes Fielder's observations in that Esperantists use Esperanto itself as a signifier of their commitment to the social movement behind the language. It is for this reason that *krokodili*-ing is such a faux pas; to use another language in place of Esperanto is to deny its legitimacy. Indeed, the defensiveness of Esperantists regarding their language and its parallels with the language attitudes seen in speakers of Navajo reflect an effort on the part of both groups for their language to survive (Amin 2020). The difference in stakes should not be minimized: for Navajo speakers, the culture and history of the Navajo Nation is tied to its language, which has been marginalized and actively suppressed by the United States throughout the entirety of that state's occupation of Navajo land. For Esperanto speakers, an internationalist philosophy and community is at stake – one which every Esperantist (excluding those raised speaking the language) has joined voluntarily.

Thus, at the Toulouse Esperanto Society, any French spoken in the room was out of necessity: clarifying the contents of a complicated email, or translating an unfamiliar word, or explaining the ingredients of a particular flavor of tea. As such, those who did choose to entertain me did so in a mixture of English and Esperanto, and not (or, well, not *entirely*) because my French was intermediate-level at best, but rather because English was at least a degree removed from being the first language of the people in the room, and thereby a bit more dignified, it seemed, than defaulting to French. After preemptively apologizing for my *krokodili* and receiving faint, weary chuckles in response, I decided to twiddle my thumbs at the end of the table as I took in the atmosphere of the room and waited for an appropriate time to ask some questions, if it were ever to arrive.

Eventually, the Esperantist sitting next to me sensed my awkwardness and introduced himself. His name was Francisko – an "Esperantisation" of his given name, which was ultimately of little import, as the group's dedication to their shared second language extended to the names they used to refer to each other. Francisko explained to me, in English, that he was in the process of translating an article he had written in Esperanto into French, as well as, offhandedly, that he himself was actually from Germany. "Multaj linguoj!" ("(So) many languages!"), I exclaimed, impressed; "ling*voj*," he corrected, without missing a beat.

In an attempt to show my respect for the inner workings of the Esperanto community, I asked Francisko, somewhat in jest, where he positioned himself in the *raŭmismo* vs. *finvenkismo* debate. Tellingly, he laughed. He told me that the great majority of Esperantists were *raŭmistoj* these days – certainly in France, at least – as the *finvenkist* philosophy was simply impractical. Considering the scale and intimacy of Toulouse's Esperanto society, Francisko's perspective made quite a bit of sense; certainly, despite its small size, this community was an active one. Curious, I asked Francisko how he thought Esperanto was perceived in France. His response complexified my understanding of the Esperanto movement considerably: in France, he said, the Esperanto movement is intimately intertwined with the study of endangered languages, like Breton, Franco-Provençal, or Occitan, the latter being the historically dominant language of Toulouse and its environs (Alén Garabato 1999).

Just as the gears began to turn in my head, another fellow Esperantist entered the room, and though Francisko, graciously, introduced us (in Esperanto, of course), it was clear that my presence was increasingly becoming an imposition, so I decided to say my regards and leave. Thankfully, Toulouse's Esperantists had given me plenty to work with. Intrigued by the idea of a connection between France's Esperanto community and its endangered languages, I set off to the Ostal d'Occitània, an Occitan language school and cultural center in a tucked-away alley in the heart of Toulouse. I hoped to learn more about the overlap between Esperanto and Occitan in the city, if it existed. I figured I would ask whoever was at the front desk if they happened to have any thoughts on the subject and leave it at that. Suffice to say, my expectations were subverted.

Initially, it seemed that the Ostal was closed for the time being, but just as I was about to turn back, I was beckoned into the center's interior plaza by a huddle of voices. My parents had struck up a conversation with the director of the center, a woman named Ludivina who, despite being on her lunch break, took a great interest in my thesis. She invited me into the Ostal's main office and offered me an incredible assortment of pamphlets: an Occitan language intensive, an Occitan cultural magazine, a calendar of

Occitan-language events, and so on. As I sifted through the materials, awestruck, she asked me what I might be interested in specifically; not knowing where to begin (and at this point relying entirely on my shaky French), I asked her, shrinkingly, if she might know anything about the Esperanto movement in Toulouse. “Oh, yes,” replied Ludivina, as she took my phone to give me the contact information of two local professors and the President of the Institute of Occitan Studies – all of whom, she mentioned, had worked a great deal with Esperanto.

Though, unfortunately, I never received a response from those professors, I have included the above anecdote to illustrate the enthusiasm that unites the studies and speakers of Esperanto and endangered languages in France. This connection is corroborated by the wide body of empirical sociolinguistic research (including the aforementioned Ahearn article) suggesting that Esperantists’ philosophical unity around the *interna ideo* parallels the sociolinguistic attitudes of self-preservation – that is to say, that the significance of maintaining an active speaker community is existentially important for reasons beyond the language itself – maintained by the speakers of minority languages both in France and worldwide (Christoph 2012; Gobbo 2017; Edwards 2010; Ahearn 2012). This is particularly interesting given the tumultuous history of the Esperanto movement within France, though, as I will soon explain, the exigence of the *interna ideo* has been strengthened by this history, as Esperanto’s internal philosophies have guided its use as a tool of popular resistance in France, the rest of Europe, and beyond.

Early Development, World War I and the Interwar Period

France was one of the first countries in which Esperanto became truly popular. In a 1907 report by early Esperantist Louis de Beaufront (who would later have a hand in the creation of Ido, the most prominent offshoot of Esperanto; see Chapter 6), it is described that Esperanto's regularity and ease of learning led the language to quickly gain sympathy, and even institutional support, across much of the country. The author reports that, around the turn of the century, there were about a hundred local Esperanto centers throughout France, not to mention that "in Paris every district [had] its Esperanto class, and sometimes there [were] three or four classes in one district." He elaborates:

> At many of the garrisons Esperantists are conducting classes in barracks, for the War Department of France is very favorable to us. The Minister of War has given his permission to all grades of the army to join the French Esperanto Society, and the Minister of Marine has done the same for the navy. Now we often find lieutenants and captains giving instruction in Esperanto to the men of their garrisons, and many of the officers assist at the meetings, lectures, and celebrations of our groups (De Beaufront 1907).

The movement gained even more momentum in 1905, when the first World Esperanto Congress was held in the French city of Boulogne-Sur-Mer. There, Zamenhof published his Declaration of Boulogne, in which he outlined a framework for the broader Esperanto movement consisting of five points: first, that "Esperantism" sought to introduce an international auxiliary second language, nothing more; second, that Esperanto is the most viable option for such a language (this being the backbone of *finvenkism*); third, that Esperanto belongs to no one, and may be used freely; fourth, that the Fundamento is the single authority over Esperanto, excluding even Zamenhof himself (the significance of this particular stipulation is discussed at length in Chapter 5); and finally, that an Esperantist is a fluent Esperanto speaker, nothing more, nothing less (a definition which has loosened since, as seen within this very thesis) (Schor 2016; Zamenhof 1905). The Boulogne Declaration has become a defining moment in the history of Esperanto, and cemented France as a cornerstone of the language movement (Schor 2016; De Beaufront 1907).

Around the time of the Declaration, Esperanto began to gain substantial traction throughout the rest of Europe as well (and, indeed, the entire world; as highlighted in the previous chapter, it was around the early 1900s that Esperanto started picking up speed in Japan). One major milestone was the case of Neutral Moresnet (known in Esperanto as *Neŭtrala Moresnet* or *Amikejo*, "place of friendship"), a small polity between Belgium and Kingdom of Prussia with a population of around 3,000, which gained notoriety in 1908 as the first (and, to this day, only) territory to make Esperanto an official language, driven by the enthusiasm of local Dr. Wilhelm Molly. A number of the area's residents took up the language, and Moresnet was eventually declared the "world capital" of the Esperanto community by the World Congress of Esperanto, a distinction which lasted until the outbreak of the First World War a few years later (Hoffmann and Nendza 2003).

Disruptive as it was to the status quo in Europe that had allowed Esperanto to flourish, the First World War saw the first large-scale practical application of the language's goals. As the continent plunged into conflict, Esperanto came to provide a crucial means of contact between a wide variety of groups – railway workers, healthcare providers, jurists, clergy members, and even vegetarians – who turned to Esperanto groups as a means of discussion in "the absence of other types of transnational associations." As the war progressed, the language spread throughout prison camps among conscientious objectors (among them Slovak writer Albert Škarvan, a friend of Leo Tolstoy, as well as Hungarian lawyer Tivadar Soros, father of George Soros), bolstered by its regular design and internationalist philosophy. It was during this period that Esperanto came to be widely associated with the pacifist movement; Zamenhof himself was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize eight times (Alcalde 2021). Similarly, hundreds of Esperantists used their connections through the language to coordinate medical relief efforts and organize housing for displaced people; in response, the Red Cross gave the language its official blessing immediately after the war, and called for the language to be used to facilitate further relief efforts and "promote international understanding" (Hernández 1996).

This brings us to the 1920s – and back to the League of Nations. After Japanese delegate Nitobe Inazō's report on Esperanto (see Chapter 3), the language gained a substantial amount of traction within the nascent organization; in fact, ten of the League's eleven delegates accepted a proposal for it to be officially adopted as the medium of international relations. The lone dissenter was, in an ironic twist of fate, the French delegate Gabriel Hanotaux, who saw Esperanto as an existential threat to the status of French as a world language (Borkson 2015). Nevertheless, despite this setback and Zamenhof's passing in 1917, Esperanto continued to flourish into the 1920s. In one 1928 article by F. A. Hamann, entitled "The Progress of since the World War," the author excitedly describes the "constantly growing" assortment of technical magazines in Esperanto, the use of the language on international trains in Czechoslovakia and the

Netherlands, Esperanto's proclamation as "the international commercial language" in Dresden, and the prolific output of Esperanto-language radio programs in Europe and the United States, which, says Hamann, "ignoring all national frontiers, are rapidly turning our planet into one vast auditorium" (Hamann 1928).

Esperanto began to face surmounting challenges in the decades leading up to World War II, but nevertheless still thrived across much of Europe, and to a lesser extent the entire world. In one defense of Esperanto against the language being labeled a "code" by the Board of Superintendents of New York City in 1936, Alfred E. Johns describes Esperanto's present vitality, again highlighting the extensiveness of research journals and radio broadcasts being made in the language, particularly in Japan (Johns 1938). Furthermore, sociologist Herbert Newhard Shenton, himself cited by Johns, notes:

> The languages which have been seriously considered [as international auxiliary languages] are constructed languages based on natural languages, and they have been variously described as invented, synthetic, and artificial. In the actual discussion of the various cosmopolitan conferences, Esperanto has received the most attention (Shenton 1933; Johns 1938)

Esperanto's international character and the philosophies that drove its creation and propagation afforded it a substantial amount of credence among European and American intellectuals during a time when transnational linkages were becoming all the more significant. Unfortunately, those same qualities would make Esperanto a target of repression in the following decades to come.

Zamenhof, Judaism, and Esperanto

Towards the end of the 1930s, a number of governments in Europe began to crack down on Esperanto and its philosophy. The language was initially quite popular in the Soviet Union, and even received some support from the government, but was eventually fiercely resisted by Joseph Stalin, who effectively banned Esperanto in 1937 and began "mass arrests, deportations, and killings" of Esperantists starting in 1941 out of fear of an organized anti-nationalist movement (Harlow 1992; Sutton 2008). Similar measures occurred in Portugal, under the dictatorship of António de Oliveira Salazar, as well as in Spain, under Francisco Franco, where Esperanto's ties to the anarchist movement were perceived as an explicit threat to the state (Melo 2022; Lins 2016). Interestingly, the language was popular in Fascist Italy as well, whose Esperantist Federation appreciated the structural and aesthetic similarities between Esperanto and Italian and saw the language as a bridge to garnering support for Italy's colonial conquest of Ethiopia (as some Japanese Esperantists had attempted to do in Manchuria); support for Esperanto began to wane only because of external pressures from Nazi Germany, which condemned the language as "an ally of world Jewry" (Lins 2016).

Indeed, at no point in the history or development of Esperanto can Zamenhof's Jewish identity be discounted. The author's hometown of Białystok was in the so-called "Pale of Settlement," the Russian Empire's mandated area of Jewish residence, and the linguistic discrimination he faced and witnessed as a Yiddish speaker enforced his understanding of the necessity of an international language. The very *interna ideo* of Esperanto was largely guided by Zamenhof's philosophy of *homaranismo* (see Chapter

2), itself developed out of “Hillelism,” his synthesis of the teachings of Jewish religious leader Hillel the Elder (Madella 2019). In fact, scholar of Jewish history Rebecca Zobrin argues that the success of early Esperantists “hinged on their ability to link their larger ideological platforms with the economic and psychological hardships facing internal Jewish migrants in the Russian Empire,” and that “Zamenhof’s Esperanto movement proposed a plan that facilitated Jewish assimilation by metaphorically forcing all residents of Eastern Europe to face the same struggle of learning a new language” (Kobrin 2010; Madella 2019). In fact, in one 1905 letter, Zamenhof wrote: “My Jewishness has been the main reason why, from earliest childhood, I have given my all for a single great idea, a single dream – the dream of the unity of humankind” (Schor 2009).

Zamenhof himself wrote the first grammar of Yiddish in 1879, and was initially active in the early Zionist movement after a wave of pogroms near Białystok, though he later abandoned it, arguing that the movement would not solve the problems faced by the Jewish people (Kiselman 2022). He expanded upon this viewpoint in 1914, after declining an invitation to join a new Jewish Esperantist organization, saying:

> I am profoundly convinced that every nationalism offers humanity only the greatest unhappiness... It is true that the nationalism of oppressed peoples – as a natural self-defensive reaction – is much more excusable than the nationalism of peoples who oppress; but, if the nationalism of the strong is ignoble, the nationalism of the weak is imprudent; both give birth to and support each other (Maimon 1958).

In creating Esperanto, Zamenhof envisioned a world beyond the nationalism and anti-Semitism that continued to brutalize his community in Białystok and Jewish people around the world. Tellingly, he narrated these struggles alongside those of marginalized people as a whole; as much as his design of Esperanto was him "writing what he knew" (in its structural similarities to Yiddish, for example) and thereby limited by its Eurocentrism, the international scope of Zamenhof's vision, nor its origins in his understanding of Judaism, cannot be repudiated. The essence of Esperanto, Zamenhof's philosophies of *homaranismo* and the *interna ideo*, and indeed his motivations for creating the language in the first place, are all inseparable from the author's lived experience as a Jewish Yiddish speaker.

World War II

Esperanto, a language created by a Jewish scholar, and modeled after Jewish theology, in order to foster a peaceful, post-nationalist world, was in almost every aspect a target of the Nazi regime. Nazi Germany's understanding of Esperanto is summarized, to a large extent, by the address of ex-Esperantist and Gestapo confidant Theodor Koch to the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA), the highest-level Nazi intelligence agency:

> Because the world organization of the Esperanto movement, in addition to its Messianic task of abolishing the languages of the peoples (First Epistle to the Corinthians 13.8), also serves as a political auxiliary force (for example in the siege of Germany before 1914), all leading Esperantists should be considered not only as cultural subversives but also as international conspirators (Lins 2016).

Nazi officials perceived Esperanto as a threat both for its potential and track record as a tool of resistance as well as its connection to Judaism. Koch later claimed that Zamenhof "sought to realize Jewish world rule," and that Esperantism – not just Esperanto – "plays the role of an auxiliary force for the Jews." Furthermore, Hitler himself claimed

Esperanto was part of an "international Jewish conspiracy" in *Mein Kampf*, and denounced Esperantists as "enemies of the state" (Sutton 2008).

Over the course of the 1930s and 1940s, the RSHA compiled detailed lists of Esperanto organizations and the individual addresses of Esperantists across Europe, and eventually sent many of them to concentration camps alongside other so-called "enemies of the state." This violence occurred contemporaneously with crackdowns on Esperanto in Eastern Europe (such as in the Soviet Union), largely motivated, too, by anti-Semitism, which, in the words of Esperantist historian Ulrich Lins, "reinforced among the broad spectrum of people an antipathy toward Esperanto as a Jewish creation." This wholesale assault upon Esperanto, originating from both sides of World War II, was to a degree far beyond anything the language had faced before. Indeed, "there was no precedent in the history of the Esperanto movement for a threat of this scale" (Lins 2016).

The war delivered an immeasurable blow to Esperanto. Among the many prominent Esperantists murdered in the Holocaust were teenage author, artist, translator, and native Esperanto speaker Petr Ginz as well as all three of Zamenhof's children (Reisz 2007; Schor 2009). Nevertheless, Esperanto endured through World War II as exactly what the Nazis feared it would be: a tool of resistance. In 1942, the Danish Workers' Esperanto Club published *Tra densa mallumo* ("Through Deepest Darkness,") a book that praised the efforts of Chinese Esperantists in their resistance against Japanese invasion, and maligned German Esperantists for their attempts to "sanitize" the movement in an appeal to the Nazi Party; similar activities occurred, often in secret, across Esperantist Leagues in Belgium and Austria (Laborista Esperanto Klubo 1942; Lins 2016). Just as in the First World War decades prior, many Esperantists were at the forefront of humanitarian aid, in the form of covert warnings, letters of guarantee, and economic support (Hernández 1996). Furthermore, Esperantists taught their language to fellow prisoners in German concentration camps (Lins 1988). In the face of immeasurable repression, Esperanto strengthened transnational networks of organized opposition, driven by the internationalist philosophy of the language and its users.

The Cold War and Beyond

After the end of World War II, Esperanto managed to rebound once again, propelled by its existing social infrastructure and bolstered by the official support it received from UNESCO in its 1954 Montevideo Resolution (UNESCO 1955). As in China, the language flourished in Eastern Europe in the 1970s, where scholars and governments alike were enticed by the idea of an international language detached from the ideology of the United States, unlike English. Unfortunately, like China, English eventually supplanted Esperanto as the international language of choice in Eastern Europe as well, a process only accelerated after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The ideological backing of Esperanto does not, at least presently, outweigh the sheer extent of learning resources, media, institutional support, and population of speakers offered by English. As put by authors Robert Patterson and Stanley M. Huff, “Esperanto retains a certain cerebral charm, but English is far more practical” (Patterson and Huff 1999).

The present-day state of Esperanto will be discussed at length in the following chapter. In the meantime, despite the language having lost much of its pre-1980s and especially pre-World War II momentum, Esperanto's history in Europe, from its inception through both World Wars and into today, is invaluable in explaining why it has succeeded – as well as why it has been so violently persecuted. Within decades of its creation, Esperanto developed an international community united, at least to some extent, by a shared commitment to its goal of a post-national world. Of course, different people interpreted what a "post-national world" might mean in a number of ways: some applied Esperanto as a means of advancing unity between different countries, while others, including Zamenhof himself, sought to use Esperanto to grow beyond those differences altogether. Esperanto was informed by Zamenhof's internationalist vision, which itself was inseparably shaped by his own lived experience as a Yiddish-speaking Jew. This was transparent to those who decided to learn and use Esperanto, just as it was to those who, chauvinistically, saw Esperanto as a threat. Either way, the intricacies and missteps of the language's design did not inhibit its diffusion, but rather serve to further illuminate its ideological origins.

CHAPTER 5

Why Esperanto?

The "Cool Factor"

If, after reading this thesis, you find yourself wanting to learn Esperanto (I hope so!), an immediate question will arise: where should you go? A French learner looking to immerse themselves in the language, if they had the resources, might go to Paris, or Dakar, or Montréal, for example. An English learner has plenty of options, too: they could visit London, or New York, or Melbourne, or Dublin, or Accra, or Auckland, or Kingston, or… well, you get the point. Someone learning a less-widely-spoken language – Ossetian, or Guaraní, or Ewe, etc. – might have a more difficult time immersing themselves, but there still exists the implicit possibility that, one day, they could fly to Tskhinvali, or Asunción, or Keta, and finally put their target tongue to use. But what about the hopeful Esperantist? As we've seen, Esperanto is spoken in a wide variety of places, but if you were to find yourself in Tokyo, or Shanghai, or even Toulouse, you would hardly be "immersed" in Esperanto; furthermore, if you asked a random passerby in any of those places "*Kie estas la necesejo?*" you would be met with a blank stare by the vast majority of the population. Where, then, is the center of gravity of the Esperanto-speaking world?

Nowadays, the answer is clear: the Internet. Despite effectively being a minority language no matter where it is spoken, Esperanto punches far above its weight in terms of the sheer depth and scale of its online presence. As of writing, the Esperanto-language Wikipedia (*Vikipedio*) has over 350,000 articles ("List of Wikipedias - Meta," n.d.); language-learning service Duolingo has had an Esperanto course since 2016 ("Esperanto | Duolingo Wiki | Fandom," n.d.); the *Tekstaro*, an online corpus of Esperanto texts cited throughout this paper, has around 10.4 million words ("Tekstaro de Esperanto," n.d.); and there is a wide variety of Esperanto-language websites, blogs, fora, music, literature, movies, encoding softwares, and so on. This has given Esperanto a substantial and disproportionate level of digital visibility, a phenomenon that linguist Federico Gobbo calls "coolification" (Gobbo 2021). Indeed, beyond the language's role as an artifact of religious significance, or an instrument of proletarian liberation, or an intermediary of international diplomacy, part of Esperanto's appeal has simply been that it is "cool."

In 1985, interlinguist and Esperantologist Detlev Blanke proposed a 19-step scale (eventually expanded to 27 steps in 2006) measuring the "socialization process" of *interlanguages* – that is, languages created specifically to bridge different linguistic communities, of which Esperanto is by far and away the prime example. This is the case partly because, as Gobbo and Blanke explain, Esperanto has almost entirely transcended its "leading figure," Zamenhof, to become an ever-evolving project, used by a wide variety of people in a wide variety of ways – while still having a substantial enough corpus to remain relatively consistent and accessible (Gobbo 2021; Blanke 2006). In the paragraphs that follow, I will analyze some of Esperanto's biggest historical "rivals" using Blanke's methodology to try to explain why they did not achieve the same level of success.

Competitors

The first "major" international auxiliary language – that is to say, with widespread recognition and a sizable community of speakers – was not Esperanto, but in fact a similar project by the name of Volapük, which came about seven years before it. Volapük (from *vol* "world" + *pük* "speak") was developed by Johann Martin Schleyer, a Catholic priest from Germany. Schleyer's neighbor had difficulties sending postage to his son in the United States because the postal authorities could not decipher his handwriting; this motivated Schleyer to create a writing system called the "National Alphabet," a precursor of sorts to the International Phonetic Alphabet, which unfortunately failed to gain traction. Soon after, Schleyer heard the voice of God in a dream, who instructed him to make a universal language, and thus he created Volapük (LaFarge 2000). Volapük enjoyed a remarkable amount of success throughout the late 19th century, hosting several conferences, 316 textbooks in 25 languages, and (supposedly) nearly a million speakers, but its popularity eventually dramatically waned, largely in favor of Esperanto, for reasons I will outline below (Baugh and Cable 2001).

Firstly, from a design standpoint, many of Esperanto's biggest issues are amplified tenfold in Volapük. I will spare you the intricate details of Volapük's phonological inventory, grammar, vocabulary, and so on, and instead present you with a few of the "highlights" – that is to say, its design elements that are especially objectionable, given the context of Volapük as an *interlang*. The most glaring example is in the name of the language itself: that ⟨ü⟩ is pronounced /y/, and is accompanied by ⟨ä⟩ /ɛ~æ/ and ⟨ö⟩ /ø~œ/, in addition to the rest of the standard "five-vowel system," with some variation (/i u e o a~ɑ/). This gives Volapük a total of eight distinct vowel sounds, far more than the vast majority of languages (Ladefoged and Maddieson 1990). Volapük also has four grammatical cases, an extremely robust system of verbal inflection, and a vocabulary primarily derived from English, albeit distorted almost entirely beyond recognition (c.f. *blinön* "to bring," *dicetön* "to digest," *jak* "shark") (Midgley 2010).

As with Zamenhof, Schleyer's design of Volapük, including many of its questionable decisions, largely stemmed from his native language – in this case, German. Nevertheless, the language garnered quite a bit of international support. Its eventual downfall came about not because of widespread dissatisfaction with Volapük's tricky consonant clusters, nor its excessive diaereses, but rather the language's own internal politics. In 1889, at the Third Volapük International Congress in Paris, a Dutch linguist named Auguste Kerchoffs was elected president of the International Academy. Kerchoffs had a number of ideas to reform Volapük (namely, simplifying its grammar), but his proposals were shot down by Schleyer, who demanded veto power at the Academy; Kerchoffs refused and eventually resigned, leading to the fragmentation of the movement (LaFarge 2000). A number of interlanguages subsequently arose out of Volapük in response to Kerchoffs' changes – Nal Bino, Spelin, Orba, Dil, and many more – but none of them gained any substantial traction (Okrent 2012).

Schleyer, for what it is worth, was keenly aware of Esperanto – and highly critical of it. He declared the language "an ugly-sounding hodgepodge," and particularly condemned its "difficult" consonants (namely /ʃ/, /tʃ/, and /r/) as well as, curiously enough, its lack of umlauts. "A language without umlauts," wrote Schleyer, "sounds monotonous, harsh, and boring;" it was thereby clear to him that Esperanto "was created by a Pole" and Volapük by "a music connoisseur, composer, and poet." As evidenced by this contemporary poem published in the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, not everyone shared in Schleyer's sentiment (Okrent 2012):

A charming young student of Grük
Once tried to acquire Volapük
But it sounded so bad
That her friends called her mad,
And she quit it in less than a wük.

Some, including linguist and Esperantologist Arika Okrent, from which the above passage is cited, have argued that Esperanto's success against Volapük ultimately boils down to luck – that is to say, that Esperanto was simply "in the right place at the right time." I would dispute this. The first step of Blanke's aforementioned interlanguage scale is the transition from a manuscript into a full-fledged *Plansprachprojekt* ("language project"), which requires that a language be published in some way, so as to be visible and learnable; there is no doubt that Volapük accomplished this. Where it loses momentum, however, is in the next few steps, wherein Blanke describes how an interlanguage can transcend its creator and develop into a full-fledged community, thereby "mak[ing] the figure of the proponent no longer necessary." This entails the publication of teaching instruments (step 3), justifications for learning the language (step 4), periodicals to guide early adopters (step 5), intergenerational correspondence (step 6), and translated texts (step 7), and so on, all leading up to step 12: the formation of an interconnected, self-regulating, self-perpetuating *kleine Sprachgemeinschaft* ("small speaker community") (Blanke 2006; Gobbo 2021).

Volapük has a wide variety of resources, even into today, but it does not, nor did it ever, have a *kleine Sprachgemeinschaft* of its own – certainly not in the same way

Esperanto does. That is not to say that there is no Volapük community – there is, of course – but because of Schleyer's resistance to any sort of change in Volapük, the language was limited in its capacity to naturally evolve. Unlike any natural language, Volapük was static, beholden to the will of Schleyer himself. This rigorous top-down structure made the language and its community stable, but brittle, and thus, ironically, much more vulnerable to fragmentation. Zamenhof, on the other hand, envisioned Esperanto not only as a personal project, but as a living, breathing, ever-evolving coterie of humanistic ideals, which guided his attitudes towards the language and its speakers from the onset of its creation. As such, he was quite active in the Esperanto community during his life, but never attempted to "veto" any changes to the language – only to provide occasional clarifications (Blanke 2009).

In fact, in 1894, in response to a number of common criticisms towards Esperanto – its use of accented letters, its definite article, its grammatical case marking, etc. – Zamenhof proposed a revamped version of the language called Reformed Esperanto, sometimes referred to as "Esperanto 1894." Ironically, the vast majority of the Esperanto community vetoed Zamenhof, not the other way around, rejecting his modifications and leading him to refer to 1894 as "a wasted year" (Lapenna et al. 1974; Schor 2016). However, in 1907, a retooled version of Reformed Esperanto named *Ido* ("offspring") was anonymously submitted to the International Association of Academies' Delegation for the Adoption of an International Auxiliary Language, and, surprisingly, was quite successful; the delegation eventually declared that Esperanto seemed to be the most promising auxiliary language, but its adoption would be "on condition of several modifications to be realized… in the direction defined by… the Ido project" (Dyer 1923; Leau 1933). It was eventually revealed that "the Ido project" was primarily designed by early Esperanto advocate Louis de Beaufront, which caused some controversy; nevertheless, Ido continued to garner a considerable amount of support within the existing Esperantist movement (Jacob 1947).

Compared to Volapük, Ido posed a much more significant challenge to Esperanto, in that it explicitly addressed many of its predecessor's missteps. Unlike Esperanto, Ido's accusative suffix is optional, used only for clarification; its pronouns are more acoustically distinct, bolstering intelligibility; and its words are, by default, gender-neutral, rather than masculine, as Esperanto assumes (ApGawain et al. 2008). Admittedly, Ido's phonological inventory is still strangely robust (it even makes a /v/-/w/ distinction, which Esperanto does not), it incorporates a second-person formality distinction (i.e. a T-V distinction) in pronouns, and its vocabulary is still by and large Latinate in origin, albeit more systematically derived. That said, despite its own dubious choices, Ido garnered enough momentum to splinter the existing Esperanto community, at least to some extent: after the 1907 declaration, around 20% of Esperanto leaders, and 3-4% of ordinary learners, switched to learning it (Lapenna et al. 1974).

Today, there still exists a relatively vibrant Ido community, which, like Esperanto, has been bolstered by the advent of online resources, but it remains clear that the language has not achieved anywhere near the recognition of its ancestor. Why? Ido's relative lack of recognition is partly attributable to, as Okrent might argue, bad luck: the language suffered three major setbacks in the decades after its initial proposal. First, Louis Couturat, who had convened the aforementioned Delegation in the first place and was one of Ido's leading proponents, passed away in an automobile accident in 1914 (Dyer 1923). This, along with World War I, put a substantial damper on the nascent Ido movement from 1914 to 1920 (Guérard 1921). Finally, in 1928, another one of Ido's most prominent supporters, the Danish linguist Otto Jespersen, broke off from the movement to publish his own interlanguage, Novial (Jespersen 1928). This turbulence within the original Ido community made it difficult to match the momentum that Esperanto had spent several decades accumulating.

Furthermore, the Novial situation illustrates an underlying fundamental weakness in Ido, which, I would argue, has been the ultimate determinant of the language's relegation to "one-of-those-other-interlangs" status. From its onset, Ido was touted by its supporters as "Esperanto but better," which, from a purely design-based standpoint, it is – but only to an extent. After all, as explained above, Ido makes plenty of its own mistakes; like in any truly international auxiliary language, there is always room for improvement. However, Ido's *raison d'être* was not just to "form an international community," as Zamenhof had intended, but rather to "improve upon Esperanto," which opened it up to constant modification. Though Ido was eventually standardized in 1922, its relative lack of structure in its early years made it difficult for prospective learners to know where to begin; to go off of Blanke's criteria, Ido struggled to create a *kleine Sprachgemeinschaft* of its own partly because its users were not initially unified in the same way Esperantists, who could rely on Zamenhof's initial publications, were (Lapenna et al. 1974; Blanke

2006). Whereas Volapük suffered from a lack of flexibility, Ido in its early years had the opposite problem: its foundation was too shaky to build upon.

A number of smaller international auxiliary languages have arisen since Esperanto, all of which have encountered similar issues to Volapük and Ido. Giuseppe Piano's "Latino sine flexione," a retooling of Classical Latin that lacks any of its inflections, garnered some academic interest, but, lacking Esperanto's "strong humanitarian identification" and "loyal corps of adherents," failed to endure past World War II (Kennedy 1980). Piano's effort inspired the later Interlingua, published in 1951 by the International Auxiliary Language Association, which systematically combines English, French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese in its vocabulary so as to generate maximum recognizability for a Western European audience; like Ido, it has seen some resurgence in the digital era, but its use is still primarily confined to "isolated activists" (International Auxiliary Language Association and Gode 1951; Gobbo 2021). The same can be said for Edgar de Wahl's Interlingue (originally called Occidental), published in 1922; though de Wahl had fully intended for the language to naturally evolve, just as Zamenhof did with Esperanto, he unfortunately became isolated from the Interlingue community after he was placed in a psychiatric clinic in Estonia during its occupation by Nazi Germany, which made its perpetuation difficult (Erelt 2002).

That said, Esperanto is not the only constructed auxiliary language with a vibrant and enduring community. Among the flourishing "auxiliary languages" of today is Toki Pona, first published in 2001 by Canadian linguist Sonja Lang. It bears mentioning that Toki Pona was not actually designed to be an *interlang*, like the examples above, though it has occasionally been evaluated as one (Morin 2015; jan Misali 2017a). Lang instead created Toki Pona as a philosophical experiment in minimalism. The language has an extremely small phonological inventory of nine consonants and five vowels, a similarly restrictive syllable structure, and, most notably, a vocabulary of only 120 (eventually expanded to 137) "essential" words. Lang intended for Toki Pona to serve as an exercise in reducing complex concepts to their bare essentials, thereby promoting a clearer and positive mindset (Roberts 2007; Malmkjær 2010). She refers to it as "[her] attempt to understand the meaning of life in 120 words" (Lang, n.d.).

Why bring up Toki Pona, then, in a thesis about international auxiliary languages? There is a crucial distinction that sets both Toki Pona and Esperanto apart from all of the other projects described above. Like Zamenhof, Lang has taken an active, but not authoritative, role in the Toki Pona community; she has consistently encouraged the language to evolve but remained present as a foundational resource for its learners. Tellingly, the official Toki Pona Dictionary (also known as *ku*), published in 2021, does not provide any set definitions, but rather accumulates the results of a series of community-wide surveys led by Lang about the perceived nuances in meaning of each one of Toki Pona's words, intending to "[document] Toki Pona as a living language" (Lang 2021). As with Esperanto, Toki Pona's users are unified by a shared philosophical commitment to Lang's experiment, which is both consistent enough that it is easy and accessible to learn yet fluid enough that it may evolve and persist. (It helps, too, that Toki Pona is robustly digitized and conceptually unique – or, to use Gobbo's terminology, "cool.")

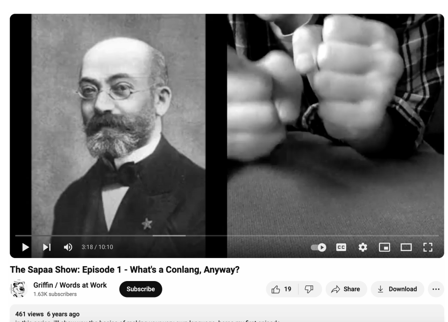
Within the histories of these constructed languages parallel to Esperanto lies the cornerstone of its success. Esperanto is far from perfect, or even ideal, as an international auxiliary language, but because of its ideological appeal and the activeness of its creator in allowing it to evolve, the language was able to quickly garner a committed community of speakers and, crucially, self-perpetuate. Whether Esperanto is “good” is a matter of opinion – again, from a design standpoint, it certainly has its issues – but for millions of people, it is interesting, consistent, and easier to learn than most languages, and in this respect, it is good *enough*. The success of Esperanto in comparison to other (perhaps even “better!”) interlanguage projects illustrates the importance of internal language attitudes in language diffusion, a factor which, it would seem, is ultimately more crucial than the quality of the language itself.

CONCLUSION

My Apologies to Dr. Zamenhof

I was first introduced to the online constructed language community in 2017, through a video series called “Conlang Critic.” In it, noted Tokiponist jan Misali dissects the designs of famous or otherwise notable “conlangs” and critiques them based on how well they accomplish their stated goals. Some of Misali’s most popular reviews are of Lojban, a hyper-regular engineered language designed for maximum efficiency; Quenya, one of the fictional Elvish languages devised by J.R.R. Tolkien for his Lord of the Rings series; and, of course, Esperanto, which as of this writing has accrued a hefty 287,000 views and introduced scores of young hobby-linguists (myself included) to what can comfortably be deemed the most important conlang in history.

Misali is extremely critical of Esperanto, for many of the reasons outlined at the beginning of this thesis. In particular, they highlight the aforementioned /x/~/h/ distinction, the presence of cross-linguistically rare phonemes like /dʒ/ and /z/, the abundance of cumbersome diacritics in writing, the “needlessly complicated” grammar (with particular emphasis on Esperanto’s case markers, which, they argue, could have easily been resolved with word order), and the Eurocentrism and misogyny inherent to Esperanto’s morphology and broader design philosophy (jan Misali 2017b). All of these criticisms are valid, of course, but as a result, to this day, Esperanto is the butt of many jokes in the conlang community. It is a poster child for poor design. The first linguistics-related video of my own that I ever published, at age 14, was a tutorial on how to make one’s own constructed language, in which I summarize Esperanto in the following terms:



> "There's this guy, Zamenhof, and he was like, 'I'm gonna unite the world, by making a language, and everybody can learn the language, and everybody will speak the language, and it was a really sh***y language, it was a really bad language… but he tried, and that was what was important, so we all love him."

Misali and I have since become friends and frequent collaborators. As such, it is with a heavy heart that I say that their original review of Esperanto is, in my opinion, limited, and that Esperanto – and Zamenhof – deserve much more credit in the conlang community than Misali implies it should receive.

No language exists in a vacuum. This claim would seem quite uncontroversial in describing any *natural* language; after all, language contact and evolution are invaluable components of how a language comes to be. To that end, just as languages cannot be separated from each other, a language cannot be separated from the contexts of time and place in which it is spoken. Old English would not be criticized, for example, because it lacks a word for "microprocessor," just as the jargon used among English-speaking computer programmers is not criticized for having too much vocabulary related to computers. I question, then, why Esperanto is all too often not afforded this same treatment. Misali's review, as well as that of my 14-year-old self (albeit in cruder terms), would suggest that this is because Esperanto is a singular piece, with specific goals, created and sustained by Zamenhof alone, but this is not the case. The history of Esperanto conveys that the language has meant a considerable variety of things for millions of people, and that a crucial component of its success lies both in its philosophical and ideological backing and the extent to which Zamenhof was able to step back and, like an attentive but not-too-clingy parent, allow Esperanto to take on a life of its own.

Empirical data surrounding the use of Esperanto suggests that there does indeed exist an independent Esperanto culture that socializes its users in a uniquely internationalist way, though this culture as a whole does not entirely overcome the underlying cultural norms of the places in which Esperanto is spoken. It is crucial to remember that for the vast majority of its adherents, Esperanto, unlike any natural language, is entirely elective; Esperantists choose to dedicate a large portion of their time into learning and using the language, and they do so in lieu of more "practical" languages. The draw of learning Esperanto is not to integrate oneself into the global financial market, or to provide economic opportunities for one's family, or connect with one's heritage (well, not usually); rather, it is for the sake of the language itself, and to join a like-minded international community of people with a passion for the language who share that philosophical interest. It makes sense, then, that its users share a general proclivity towards making the language more accessible for more people, and yet that this proclivity is still regulated by the day-to-day cultural constraints of spoken language. Nevertheless, the social environment surrounding Esperanto is ever-evolving.

More broadly, the imagined culture of Esperanto – and its limitations – offer a number of implications for the field of sociolinguistics. The advent of the Internet has propelled an increasingly deterritorialized ecosystem of information and community, one in which voluntary associations and hyper-particular cultural niches like that of Esperanto have thrived. In this setting, the idea of language as a "symbol of social identity" takes on new meaning. For now, Esperanto's goals have not managed to entirely transcend national governments – nor, from the *raumist* perspective, have they cultivated an Esperanto culture truly independent from the conventions of the real-world societies around it. That being said, as community membership grows more fluid, digital, and specific, whether Esperanto has unlocked its full potential remains to be seen.

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