

ESPERANTO (S)EN PERSPEKTIVO? CROATIAN ESPERANTISTS ON THE INTERNATIONAL AUXILIARY LANGUAGE ESPERANTO

Krunoslav Puškar*

University of Zagreb
Zagreb, Croatia

DOI: 10.7906/indecs.13.2.10
Regular article

Received: 15 April 2014.
Accepted: 20 August 2014.

ABSTRACT

To our knowledge, there is to date no significant number of sociological studies dealing with the Esperanto movement, and there are even fewer sociolinguistic explorations of the whole Esperanto phenomenon. Concentrating on the Croatian Esperanto movement, we conducted an extensive study of Croatian Esperantists' attitudes towards the structure of Esperanto, and their perception of the Esperanto movement and the overall Esperanto phenomenon – aspects still conspicuously missing in recent Esperantological research. This study offers invaluable insight into these under-researched interlinguistic areas, and also into the specific outlook of the traditional Croatian Esperanto movement.

KEY WORDS

esperantology, interlinguistics, sociolinguistics, attitudes towards languages

CLASSIFICATION

JEL: O35, Z19

*Corresponding author, *mp*: krunoslavpuskar2@gmail.com +385 91 7848630;
M. Potočec 32, HR – 48 260 Križevci, Croatia

INTRODUCTION

More than 125 years have passed since Dr Ludwig Zamenhof ‘crossed the Rubicon’ and published the first grammar of Esperanto. ‘Doktoro Esperanto,’ as he signed himself anonymously when his long developed project was finally published in Warsaw on July 26, 1887, proposed to offer a cure for the treatment of international misunderstanding that had been a tangible problem since the Tower of Babel’s confusion of tongues. However, as is widely known, Dr Zamenhof’s invention ultimately did not succeed in bridging the international communication chasm and solving the perennial problem of *confusio linguarum*. It encountered various problems through the years: repeated proposals for the reform of certain language features; relatively slow growth of its language community; suppression, persecution and execution of Esperantists by Hitler, Stalin, and others; bans and a lack of support from governments and international bodies; faded interest in the language beginning in the second half of the twentieth century, and persistent criticism by language experts and non-language experts alike.

Although Zamenhof’s expectations have not come to fruition, Esperanto still remains the sole eligible candidate for a neutral medium of international communication, and the only one which has managed to develop a significant worldwide language community. This community has kept the language alive, keeping it in contention as a neutral means of global communication at some point in the future, for the likes of which there has been no precedent in human history. Let us explore the actual position of Esperanto in today’s world.

In the EU framework, even though the position of the English language seems entrenched for the time being, the shift from linguistic monopoly to ‘oligopoly’ seems to be achievable only through a neutral supralanguage. The most likely candidate for such a function is the international auxiliary language Esperanto, a constructed language which serves both as a bridge to other nations and as a retaining wall against an English-only scenario. Although many would dispute this function, according to Phillipson’s [1] preface to the Esperanto edition of his well-known monograph *English-only Europe?*, ‘Esperanto is a reality, not simply a utopian idea. It also symbolises idealism, passion for languages, and the principle of language equality that animates the activity of Esperantists. [...] Esperanto is in itself a challenge to English-only thinking’ (translation by K. Puškar). In Brozović’s [2; p.80] words, ‘Esperanto seeks to become an *international* language, that is, the second language of every human being in all international relations, official and private, eliminating the rivalry between the so-called major and global languages for that function, and their forcing themselves on “little” languages. Put differently, it also seeks, in our view, the preservation of all ethnic languages, many of which are disappearing from the language stage on a daily basis’ (author’s italics and quotation marks) (translation by K. Puškar).

As is clear from previous text, Esperanto, unlike many other languages, plays a significant role in raising our consciousness about linguistic diversity and the deleterious effect on linguistic diversity of language mastodons such as English. In the Esperanto community there is a well-known saying: ‘In your town or city speak the local language, in your country speak your national language, and in the world speak Esperanto.’ In other words, the idea of Esperanto is to become an addition, not a substitute, that is, not to seek to replace natural languages, but to serve as their supplement to ensure neutral international communication. However, not everybody is confident that Esperanto would not replace natural languages once it approached a global role¹. In Archibugi’s [3; pp.544-545] view, Esperanto seems to be a useful instrument for pointing at language asymmetry, but not for correcting it: ‘I do not advocate the use of Esperanto, but rather the idea that it is the responsibility of individuals and governments to remove the language barriers that obstruct communication.’

Apart from awareness of linguistic equality and inequality, there is, according to Fettes [4], a range of effects that Esperanto and its idea actually promote: ‘Such experiences can transform students’ perception of the world through the awakening of awareness and interest in other cultures, and lead to a reassessment of their own linguistic heritage together with the social practices and power relations in which it is enmeshed.’ However, even though it has many positive traits, it is difficult to see the role that Esperanto might play in the world’s linguistic future. According to Fettes [5], with the rise of the idea of linguistic equality, it seems quite possible that Esperanto will find a wider role. But, according to Blanke (in an interview with Ščukanec [6; pp.15-16]), that is actually difficult to foresee².

At any rate, in Moskovsky’s (2009) view, ‘Esperanto seems to hold a somewhat unique position among other artificial languages in terms of its popularity and number of users. It is also probably the only existing artificial language which in some (admittedly rare) cases was acquired as a first language’ [8; p.1]. Indeed, among approximately 2 000 000 (unofficial) L2 speakers of Esperanto, there seem to be roughly 200-2000 (unofficial) native L1 speakers of Esperanto comprising the rich Esperanto community. It is important to note that no other constructed language, even in its heyday, has claimed as many adherents as Esperanto.

Also, as some studies have shown, Esperanto is a good and useful introduction to the study of other (natural) languages. In particular, Esperanto has been demonstrated to have propaedeutic value. According to research directed by Helmar Frank at the Institute of Pedagogic Cybernetics of the University of Paderborn, Germany, a knowledge of Esperanto makes the learning of other languages easier and helps develop logical thinking in children³. Other research suggests that one is able to express oneself more easily and more unambiguously in Esperanto than in other languages, proving in turn that Esperanto might be a better bridge language than natural languages.

Also, it is often claimed that Esperanto actually frees its speakers from the language handicap and language anxiety that in effect leave many speakers of natural languages tongue-tied. According to its proponents, Esperanto, because of its flexibility, gives its speakers the feeling that they are in fact speaking their own, and not a foreign, language. According to Pool and Fettes [9; p.2], ‘[a]n invented language (not necessarily Esperanto itself), designed as a global auxiliary language in which fluency can be achieved at low cost, might make the world interlingual. If it became customary to use such a language for all translingual communication, the burden of linguistic accommodation would be both small and equal for all. If the language retained its auxiliary status, bilingualism would become a near-universal condition.’

However, when finally officially accepted in the EU⁴ because of its positive educational value, Esperanto would need a new educational infrastructure. According to François Grin [10], an economist commissioned by the French Government, if Europe adopted Esperanto, it would actually save 25 billion euros (US\$ 28 billion) per year. Here it is clear that the market value of Esperanto has to be considerably increased if it is to be chosen by educational authorities for educational purposes.

Some studies of Esperanto address scepticism about the language on the part of non-Esperantists. One such case is ethnicist prejudice against Esperanto because of its simplicity. Such views equate it with Orwell’s fictional creation, *Newspeak*, whose goal was to simplify and constrain thought processes. Esperanto is also criticised as a bastardised and hotchpotch tongue – imperfect in many aspects. Even though there is no sound basis to support such claims, emotional charge whenever a constructed language is mentioned seems unavoidable. In our opinion, this excessive criticism is not so much connected with irrational fears or underlying anxiety among non-Esperantists, as Piron [11, 12] exhaustively suggested, but with significant knowledge deficits concerning the idea and structure of Esperanto. Also,

psychological reactions to constructed languages seem to be particularly acute, because such languages are imagined to be completely flawless – in opposition to natural languages which are not. For some, it would seem that the search for a constructed language has always been a search for a perfect language.

In addition to widespread rejection of Esperanto by non-Esperantists, a fierce rivalry continues among major national languages, precluding the possibility that any one language might be unanimously chosen to become the official global language. For Esperanto to gain wide acceptance and the slightest chance to stay in the race for an international means of communication, it must overcome its century-long complex of linguistic inferiority. This can only be achieved by experienced Esperanto speakers, who often play a key role in how the language itself is perceived by others and how it is actually disseminated. Only by publicly emphasising its positive traits, in comparison to other languages, and the rich culture that it has developed in almost every country, can Esperanto aspire to be considered a serious candidate for an official international language. This study deals with Esperantists' perceptions of the Esperanto phenomenon; such perceptions play a vital role also in how non-Esperantists perceive it.

WHAT IS AN ESPERANTIST?

Before dealing with the study, we must first define an Esperantist. If we take a look at the meaning the term had approximately 100 years ago, we find that it tended to denote any active Esperanto speaker who was at the same time a member of a local or national Esperanto association or any international Esperanto organisation. Today, in a rapidly changing Esperanto movement worldwide, the term Esperantist only presupposes an active Esperanto speaker and supporter, whereas membership in an Esperanto organisation is no longer a necessity. Younger Esperantists join the Esperanto movement mostly by way of the Internet, particularly through language-learning websites (such as *lernu.net*), social networks (e.g. *Facebook* or *ipernity*) or any other means of digital contact. They express no strong need to belong to a conventional organisation. Because of the influence of the electronic media on Esperanto and the Esperanto movement, they may also have no need of a teacher or a formal language-learning context since they primarily teach themselves, making the known model of the membership-based Esperanto community increasingly obsolete. Therefore, since our study primarily deals with a specific population mainly belonging to the old model of the Esperanto community, it does not take into account attitudes of other Esperanto speakers and supporters, which would be interesting to compare with those of members of the traditional movement.

A STUDY OF ATTITUDES AND OPINIONS ON A NEUTRAL INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE AMONG CROATIAN ESPERANTISTS

AIM

The aim of our research was to analyse the language attitudes of present members of the Croatian Esperanto-League (KEL, *Kroata Esperanto-Ligo*) towards Esperanto. The League has to this day maintained a stable and sizable language community numbering around 500 members. Since to our knowledge the Esperanto community has not been the focus of many studies [13, 14], we wanted to investigate unresearched aspects of this community. Such a study, we felt, might reveal insights into the issues facing the most widely used constructed language and its community, through the eyes of KEL members⁵.

The research looked into the attitudes of present KEL members, Esperanto course attendees, and active and less-active Esperantists. Its goal was to determine who Croatian Esperantists

are; to explore common criticisms of Esperanto's structure as viewed by Croatian Esperantists; to gain an insight into the Esperanto movement; and to acquaint ourselves with the overall Esperanto phenomenon in an EU and world context. We looked at numbers in the aggregate: had our sample been bigger, we might have been able to distinguish attitudinal differences within the group⁶.

METHOD

Participants

The sample comprised 108 randomly selected Esperantists living in Croatia. To be precise, 54 female and 54 male Esperantists voluntarily participated in the study, which was mostly carried out in the summer of 2010. Demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

On close inspection one can see that the sample was balanced in some characteristics. For instance, concerning gender, the study included an equal number (54) of female and male respondents. However, in terms of age, male respondents were slightly older (53,04 years) than female respondents (45,52 years). The average age is high (49,28 years) – which clearly demonstrates the social context of today's traditional Croatian Esperanto movement. Another important characteristic of Croatian Esperantists is their place of residence; according to the data obtained, Esperanto seems to be accessible only to people living in cities (55,14 %) and towns (40,19 %). There are virtually no Esperanto clubs founded in villages or smaller locations.

As far as participants' education is concerned, a significant share of Croatian Esperantists turned out to be highly educated, either having a university education or being on track to complete it (57,41 %). Here, one can only speculate on the reasons why people with less education are not more highly represented.

To set out the social context of the Croatian Esperanto movement clearly, it is of prime importance also to demonstrate it in linguistic terms – see Table 2. According to the study, Esperantists seem to be acquainted with 2,82 FLs besides Esperanto. Although it would be an exaggeration to call them polyglots, it is certain that they are very knowledgeable about other languages – female (3,28 %) more than male participants (2,37 %). However, on the basis of self-assessment, only 61,10 % of Croatian Esperantists claim advanced Esperanto language skills, slightly higher than advanced English language skills – 50,55 %.

In general, only 44,44 % of participants seem to be satisfied with their language skills, including their skills in Esperanto. Also, only 41,66 % of participants expressed a possibility of learning another FL. It is debatable if this is somehow connected with their self-perceived talent for learning FLs, which is notably low; only 38,83 % of participants consider that they have a talent for learning FLs.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample ($N = 108$).

Variable		N	Percentage, %
Gender	female	54	50
	male	54	50
Age	female	54	45,52
	male	53	53,04
	total	107	49,28
Place of residence	village	5	4,67
	town	43	40,19
	city	59	55,14

Table 2. Language characteristics of the Croatian Esperanto movement.

Variable		N	Percentage, %
FLs learned (without Esperanto)	female	177	3,28
	male	128	2,37
	sum	305	2,82
Advanced self-assessment of Esperanto language skills	female	33	30,55
	male	33	30,55
	sum	66	61,10
English language skills	female	48	81,48
	male	43	79,63
	sum	91	84,26
Advanced self-assessment of English language skills	female	29	60,42
	male	17	39,53
	sum	46	50,55
Satisfaction with their language skills	female	33	30,55
	male	15	13,89
	sum	48	44,44
Intention of learning other languages	female	26	24,07
	male	19	17,59
	sum	45	41,66
Talent for learning language/s ⁹	female	25	46,29
	male	15	30,61
	sum	40	38,83

Questionnaire

Our instrument for eliciting data was a questionnaire consisting of four parts. In the first part, the participants were asked to provide basic biodata (age, gender, education, vocation, place of birth, place of residence, etc.). In the next part the participants were asked to provide a list of all FLs they had learnt, to supply information on the number of years of experience with the FLs, and to self-assess their competence in these FLs. Also, in the same section the participants were asked if they were satisfied with the acquired competence in those languages, if they had any intentions of learning other FLs, and if they felt they were talented for learning languages in general.

The following part contained a 33-item questionnaire accompanied by a 3-solution (YES, NO, and MAYBE) self-report scale of agreement which the participants were supposed to answer. The items were designed to provide an insight into participants' attitudes to the Esperanto phenomenon, serving very much as an opinion poll. Of 33 items, ten were related to the structure of Esperanto, six were reflective of the Esperanto movement, and the rest (15 in number) dealt with the overall Esperanto phenomenon.

The fourth and last part of the questionnaire elicited information on the definition of an Esperantist, on positive as well as negative sides of Esperanto, and on Esperantists' opinion of the success of Esperanto as a universal language and as a language of the EU.

Participants filled in the questionnaire either in presence of the interviewer or independently at home. The questionnaire completed at home was sent to the interviewer by email. From the latter it is difficult to find out how long it actually took for participants to complete the questionnaire. However, the filling-in in the interviewer's presence lasted approximately 20 minutes.

We should also note oral and written remarks related to the questionnaire itself. Most such remarks dealt with the 33-item questionnaire and the fact that it provided only three options

(YES, NO, and MAYBE). According to some participants, more options should have been offered, especially an option allowing the participant not to answer the question. Even though such a claim sounds justifiable, the options were devised in such a manner as to allow participants to decide either positively or negatively or to express their uncertainty with the MAYBE option.

Participants' reactions were mixed. Some participants expressed surprise at some questions, mainly mistaking the statements dealing with criticism of Esperanto as expressing the views of the researchers. Other participants expressed great satisfaction with the study because it addressed significant issues in the Esperanto movement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section outlines the results of the study. We begin with demographics, moving on to linguistic issues, the Esperanto movement, and Esperantists' perception of both language and movement.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE ESPERANTO MOVEMENT

Our first hypothesis (H1), out of 40, claiming that *the Croatian Esperanto movement is primarily composed of older adherents* was significantly corroborated. Based on our individual observations, we assumed that because of the relative lack of popularity of Esperanto today, there are ever fewer (newer) Esperantists. According to the data obtained, the average age of Esperantists is 49,28 years, which is significantly high. One has to ask whether this is an indication of a moribund movement and community of speakers or the continuation of a trend. Research is needed to establish what attracted these Esperantists to start learning the language. Note also our caveat ("What is an Esperantist?") above, which suggests that the population of this study is not necessarily typical of Esperanto speakers as a whole.

In line with this hypothesis is our second hypothesis, (H2) *the Croatian Esperanto movement is primarily composed of highly educated people*. The relatively senior social structure of the movement consists to a great extent of people with a university degree (57,41 %). It can therefore be expected that people with such an education level would come across Esperanto in cities (55,14 %) and towns (40,19 %), where universities are chiefly to be found, which only confirms our next hypothesis (H3) that *the place of residence is connected with an Esperantist's knowledge of Esperanto*.

The study shows that Croatian Esperantists do not seem to be acquainted only with one FL – Esperanto. According to the data gathered, they are on average acquainted with 2,82 FLs besides Esperanto – which significantly corroborates our fourth hypothesis claiming that (H4) *Croatian Esperantists are multilingual*. Although 84,26 % of participants are also conversant with English, advanced self-assessment of their language skills is somewhat greater in Esperanto (61,10 %) than in English (50,55 %), which only to an extent confirms our next hypothesis that (H5) *Croatian Esperantists have greater self-assessment in Esperanto than in English*. Future studies should definitely compare the two languages, English and Esperanto, and determine with which participants feel themselves more at home and why.

STRUCTURE OF ESPERANTO

The study provided valuable insight into opinions on Esperanto's structure – see Table 3. Among Croatian Esperantists, the language is primarily perceived as inherently European (YES: 43,81 %; MAYBE: 28,57 %), which is probably due to the fact that Esperanto chiefly consists of an 'international' vocabulary, and which therefore significantly corroborates our hypothesis that (H6) *Croatian Esperantists perceive Esperanto as Eurocentric*. Since it is

largely connected with Europe and European languages, which are predominantly spoken by our participants, the study also indicates the belief that (H7) *Esperanto's vocabulary is easy to acquire* – 80 % of participants claiming as much. However, our next hypothesis, (H8) claiming that *there are too many neologisms and unnecessary synonyms in Esperanto*, was not confirmed, 76,19 % of participants disagreed. This can be interpreted in two ways: a) our participants have not been exposed to various registers of Esperanto at all, where they would most likely encounter neologisms, or b) the alleged profusion of neologisms and unnecessary synonyms has generally been overblown by Esperanto critics and, for that reason, it has not been noticed by Croatian Esperantists. Also, one can conclude that Croatian Esperanto speakers are quite aware of the language's 'imperfections,' but they, as an experienced language community, tend to accept them.

However, according to participants, there has not been sufficient Slavic influence on Esperanto (YES: 47,12 %; MAYBE: 27,88 %), due, no doubt, to Esperanto's predominantly Romance lexicon. This opinion only corroborates our next hypothesis (H9) claiming that *Esperanto's lexicon does not have a significant Slavic share*. However, regardless of the strong Romance influence, the study's next hypothesis, (H10) *Esperanto is equally euphonic as Italian and Spanish*, was supported by only 59,05 % of participants.

According to 74,53 % of participants, (H11) *Esperanto is not particularly simple*. Participants seem to be aware that Esperanto does not consist of a mere 16 rules, as some believe. Also, according to 88,79 % of participants, (H12) *Esperanto is not perceived as too artificial*, which clearly shows that Esperantists are very cognizant of the fact that there are interventions in standard languages, making them artificial as well, but it also shows that, having become used to the language, speakers do not consider it unnatural anymore. Furthermore, despite the popular view, (H13) *Esperanto is not a sexist language* according to 87,5 % of our participants – and despite morphological elements that might be so construed. In our view, future studies should investigate male and female views regarding gender discrimination in the linguistic structures of Esperanto.

As expected, the study also demonstrates the belief that (H14) *Esperanto has a simple grammatical structure* (YES: 95,33 %), and that therefore (H15) *Esperanto is a completely logical language* (YES: 75,24 %). As stated above, attitudes of beginners and more fluent speakers of Esperanto could be researched and compared in a future case study looking into the language's structure and the way it is perceived.

Table 3. Esperantists' attitudes towards the structure of Esperanto.

Item	Answer, %		
	YES	NO	MAYBE
1. Esperanto is in every respect a Eurocentric language.	43,81	27,62	28,57
5. Esperanto is too simple.	9,43	74,53	16,06
8. Esperanto is too artificial.	4,67	88,79	6,54
15. Esperanto's lexicon has a significant Slavic share.	47,12	25,00	27,88
18. The vocabulary of Esperanto is easy to acquire.	80,00	4,76	15,24
19. Esperanto is a sexist language.	2,88	87,50	9,62
21. Esperanto is as melodious as Italian or Spanish.	59,05	19,05	21,90
31. Esperanto has a simple grammatical structure.	95,33	1,87	2,80
32. There are too many neologisms and unnecessary synonyms in Esperanto.	2,86	76,19	20,95
33. Esperanto is a completely logical language.	75,24	10,48	14,28

THE ESPERANTO MOVEMENT

The study provides valuable information on views of the Esperanto movement – see Table 4. According to 72,64 % of participants, (H16) *Esperanto has not died as a movement*; that is, it is still considerably vital. However, our next hypothesis (H17), claiming that *there are ever fewer Esperanto meetings and congresses*, produced mixed results: 50 % of participants stated the opposite and 31,13 % were not quite sure of our hypothesis. Since our study relied heavily on answers from beginners, who had not had an opportunity to experience Esperanto meetings and congresses, as well as advanced Esperantists, who had, it is not surprising that mixed results were obtained.

According to 94,39 % of participants, (H18) *Esperanto is not sufficiently disseminated*. None claimed the opposite: after all Esperanto has still not achieved global success. However, our next hypothesis claiming that (H19) *Esperanto has experienced ghettoisation* was negated by 54,72 % of participants and 25,47 % were not certain.

Unhappiness with the spread of Esperanto was confirmed in the following hypotheses. In particular, our next hypothesis claiming that (H20) *the Esperanto movement does not have a sufficient number of Esperantists teaching the language* was confirmed by 76,19 % of our participants. Although this situation varies from one national Esperanto movement to another, the Croatian Esperanto movement has few teachers of Esperanto at its disposal. It is clear that if the movement is to grow, it needs sufficient properly trained Esperanto teachers to do so. Our next hypothesis, that (H21) *Esperanto does not have a significant number of native speakers*, was supported by 64,08 % of our participants. Though they are not a decisive factor in the language community, native speakers do demonstrate Esperanto's continuity and history and the richness of a given national movement.

The next hypothesis, claiming that (H22) *even some experienced Esperantists have problems with the acquisition of Esperanto*, left us in doubt, with 50,94 % of participants disagreeing, and 30,19 % of them uncertain. It is widely believed that there are many so-called *eternaj komencantoj* (Esp. for *eternal beginners* or 'perpetual learners') in the movement, who make little progress in learning the language, but less clarity on why this should be so. Is it connected with the lack of advanced Esperanto teachers, a limited number of accessible Esperanto meetings and congresses, absence of the desire for near-perfect language skills, or something else? There is a need for research here.

Table 4. Esperantists' attitudes towards the movement.

Item	Answer, %		
	YES	NO	MAYBE
16. Esperanto has become ghettoised, that is, made accessible only to a limited number of people who are regarded as a sect.	19,81	54,72	25,47
17. Even some experienced Esperantists have a problem with the acquisition of Esperanto.	18,87	50,94	30,19
20. Esperanto has a significant number of native speakers.	9,71	64,08	26,21
24. Esperanto is sufficiently disseminated.	0,00	94,39	5,61
25. There is a sufficient number of people who teach Esperanto.	4,76	76,19	19,05
28. There is an original culture of Esperanto.	73,08	8,65	18,27
29. There are fewer and fewer Esperanto meetings and congresses.	18,87	50,00	31,13
30. Esperanto has virtually died as a movement.	4,72	72,64	22,64

Finally, the last hypothesis dealing with the Esperanto movement, maintaining that (H23) *there is an original culture of Esperanto* was confirmed by 73,08 % of our participants. Future research on the Esperanto community should investigate Esperantists' activities in the movement, that is, their contribution to the Esperanto community, as well as their perceived reasons for such activity.

PERCEPTION OF THE ESPERANTO PHENOMENON

The study also offers important insight into the overall Esperanto phenomenon – see Table 5. According to 76,85 % of participants, (H24) *everyone can become a successful speaker of Esperanto*, but only 60,75 % of participants (MAYBE: 33,64 %) (H25) believe that *Esperanto is the easiest language to acquire*, which clearly points to participants' uncertainty regarding the perceived simplicity of Esperanto. Does this mean that in some participants' opinion there are actually easier languages than Esperanto or (more likely) that certain aspects of Esperanto are not as easy as sometimes claimed?

Some 54,21 % of participants (MAYBE: 42,05 %) do not think that (H26) *Esperanto is too difficult for non-Europeans*. Even though Esperanto is often criticised for its complicated structure, of a kind unfamiliar to non-Europeans, it is obvious that our participants are uncertain regarding this question. A possible reason is that they have not met many Esperanto-speaking non-Europeans. Also, our participants do not seem to be certain (YES: 42,99 %; NO: 40,19 %) about our next hypothesis, that (H27) *the learning of Esperanto implies being well versed in linguistics to a certain extent*. Unfortunately this was a confusing question for many and should have been worded differently: we were in fact hypothesizing that one must be conversant with basic grammatical concepts in one's mother tongue in order to acquire Esperanto successfully.

As expected, according to 70,75 % of participants, (H28) *Esperanto experiences changes on the same way as natural languages do*, and, in a similar vein, according to 62,26 % of participants, (H29) *Esperanto is not much different from natural languages*.

However, according to 80,37 % of participants, (H30) *the fact that Esperanto is a non-national language is an advantage*. Connectedness with a given nation would negate Esperanto's claim to be an international and neutral language. As expected, according to 94,39 % of participants, (H31) *Esperanto is not actually redundant even though English is predominant today*, but (H32) *Esperanto is not perceived as relevant at an international level* – according to 41,35 %. Though Esperanto may not be playing a key role internationally at present, it is useful nevertheless. Our next hypothesis was given significant support, with 95,37 % claiming that (H33) *Esperanto is too little represented in the media*. Although Esperantists generally strive to make the language and the facts about it as public as possible, it still remains vastly underreported.

In contrast to popular belief, according to 76,41 % of participants, (H34) *Esperanto will not accelerate the process of extinction of various languages and dialects*. While English is perceived as an imperial and 'killer' language, our participants do not think Esperanto could be seen this way. What is more, according to 59,81 % of participants, (H35) *Esperanto can connect all nations equally*, that is, according to 74,04 % of participants, (H36) *one can establish communication with Esperantists from other countries to an equal extent*.

The study also touched on various general issues relating to the Esperanto phenomenon. One of the issues concerned our hypothesis that (H37) *an Esperantist is a person connected with the Esperanto movement*. Answers to the question *Who would be an Esperantist according to your definition?* show that participants believe that an Esperantist is mainly a person who is either a member of the movement directly or who supports the movement indirectly, that is, who

Table 5. Esperantists' perception of the Esperanto phenomenon.

Item	Answer, %		
	YES	NO	MAYBE
2. Everyone can become a successful speaker of Esperanto.	76,85	10,19	12,96
3. Esperanto is relevant at an international level.	27,88	41,35	30,77
4. If Esperanto emerged on the world scene, it could accelerate the death of languages and dialects.	10,38	76,41	13,21
6. The fact that Esperanto is a non-national language is an advantage.	80,37	6,54	13,08
9. Esperanto can connect all nations equally.	59,81	18,69	21,50
10. Esperanto is the easiest language to acquire.	60,75	5,61	33,64
11. Esperanto is actually redundant since English is today the language that enables communication in the whole world.	0,94	94,39	4,67
12. The learning of Esperanto implies being well versed in linguistics to a certain extent.	42,99	40,19	16,82
13. Esperanto is too little represented in the media.	95,37	1,85	2,78
14. Esperanto changes linguistically in the same way as natural languages.	70,75	7,55	21,70
23. Esperanto is too difficult for non-Europeans.	3,74	54,21	42,05
26. Esperanto is not much different from natural languages.	62,26	17,93	19,81
27. One can establish equal communication with Esperantists from other countries.	74,04	10,58	15,38

supports the movement's ideology. In short, according to our study, one does not have to participate in the Esperanto movement in order to support the principles behind it. As can be seen from the plethora of various answers, there are many other conceptions to the issue of an Esperantist:

- **Who would be an Esperantist according to your definition?**

AN ESPERANTO SPEAKER¹⁰ (22): *As it was defined in Boulogne-sur-Mer [at the first international congress of Esperantists in 1905], everybody who speaks Esperanto.*¹¹ (52, m)

AN ESPERANTO SPEAKER + IDEOLOGY (18): *A person who speaks Esperanto fluently as their mother tongue and who lives for the idea of a universal world language.* (19, m)

AN ESPERANTO SPEAKER + THE MOVEMENT (17): *Even though, according to Zamenhof's definition, an Esperantist is everybody who uses Esperanto, history has shown that an Esperantist is considered anyone who is in any way connected with the Esperanto movement.* (44, m)

AN ESPERANTO SPEAKER AND USER (11): *Everybody who uses Esperanto.* (67, m)

A COSMOPOLITAN (7): *Every person who is not nationally limited and only thinks about the origin of his nation. Only that person who appreciates all peoples can be a good Esperantist.* (70, m)

OTHER (6): *An enthusiast, slightly strange for the outside world, a cosmopolitan, an idealist, interested in the sense of language.* (26, m)

AN ESPERANTO SPEAKER + (LANGUAGE) EQUALITY (4): *A person who hopes that all people in the world will one day be equal when communicating. (55, f)*

A LANGUAGE FREAK (4): *Everybody who wants to learn languages and know something new. (47, m)*

AN ESPERANTO SPEAKER + MULTICULTURALISM (2): *An Esperantist is above all a person who in their communication uses Esperanto, but also a person with a propensity to establish contacts with people from other milieus and at the same time be sensitive to the issue of intercultural dialogue. (46, m)*

AN ESPERANTO SPEAKER - THE MOVEMENT AND IDEOLOGY: *An Esperantist is in my opinion a person who speaks Esperanto. I don't agree that Esperantists should necessarily support the ideas and 'fight' for the movement. (21, f)*

AN ESPERANTO SPEAKER +/- IDEOLOGY: *An Esperantist is an Esperanto speaker regardless of whether he believes in the ideas connected with Esperanto or not. (33, f)*

The study also tried to find out what attracted people to start learning Esperanto. The language itself and the point of view afforded by a neutral language scored highest in participants' answers.

- **What attracted you the most to start learning the language?**

A NEUTRAL LANGUAGE (21): *That it is everybody's and nobody's language. (75, f)*

THE LANGUAGE ITSELF (17): *The simplicity, the lack of exceptions, euphony, a regular orthography. (78, m)*

NO LANGUAGE BARRIERS (10): *A wish to directly communicate with those who do not speak Croatian, but are our close neighbours – the Hungarians, Austrians, Italians –, and a wish not to spend the rest of my life learning all foreign languages. (57, f)*

CONTACT WITH OTHER PEOPLE (8): *The possibility of correspondence with members of different peoples, travelling to foreign countries through Esperanto, communication with foreigners in Esperanto. (44, m)*

ESPERANTISTS (8): *I think that it was not the language, but the people who wanted to teach me. I liked their cohesion and devotion. (27, f)*

A COSMOPOLITAN OUTLOOK (5): *Because it is above all nations. (54, f)*

MULTICULTURALISM (4): *The idea and possibility of hanging out with people from other countries and cultures. (44, f)*

(LINGUISTIC) CURIOSITY (4): *I was attracted by curiosity about it; I like it because it is simple and because it is spoken throughout the world. (19, f)*

TRAVELS (4): *The possibility of travelling and getting to know various cultures. (29, f)*

THE LANGUAGE ITSELF + THE IDEA (3): *The simplicity of the language and the idea of Esperanto. (39, m)*

ARTIFICIALITY (3): *It is strange and interesting because it is 'artificial'.* (19, m)

A NATIVE TONGUE (2): *My parents are Esperantists.* (22, m)

(LANGUAGE) DEMOCRACY (2): *Equality and friendship, all speakers on an equal footing.* (61, f)

THE HISTORY OF THE LANGUAGE: *Its history.* (22, f)

The study also tried to find out which aspects of the Esperanto phenomenon the Esperanto community considered positive and which negative. The fact that the language has a simple and logical structure enabling rapid acquisition, as well as its neutral outlook, rose to prominence as positive sides of Esperanto – see Table 6. However, there were many other positive sides participants pointed out in the research.

• **Which positive sides of Esperanto have you perceived that other languages do not have?**

All in all, the study showed that participants saw more positive than negative traits in the Esperanto phenomenon, corroborating our hypothesis that (H38) *Esperanto has more positive than negative sides*. Much of the criticism dealt with the structure of the language, as can be seen in the answers in Table 6.

• **Have you perceived some negative sides of Esperanto in general?**

NO (40)

YES – AS A LANGUAGE (INTERNALLY)¹² (20): *A majority of the vocabulary is based on Indo-European languages, so I suppose that to speakers of other language areas it [Esperanto] is not as close. Also, because of its logic and simplicity, a part of language diversity has been 'sacrificed,' because many words are created by the addition of prefixes and suffixes to a word of an opposite meaning.* (22, f)

Rigidity, a lack of euphony, chauvinism, a belief in its own logic. (26, m)

Copying of ethnic languages in a negative sense, that is, it abounds in synonyms and homonyms, which is good for poetry, but not for reality. (72, m)

YES – AS A MOVEMENT (8): *Occasional aggressiveness while defending their stance.* (21, f)

Fanatics in the Esperanto movement, love affairs between people living on two different continents, broken hearts. (22, f)

A mistake by the ingenious 'creator' of Esperanto that he pushed the internal idea of Esperanto alongside the language. (77, m)

People who deal with Esperanto are inadequate to give Esperanto the strength needed to achieve its goal. (39, m)

Inertia in the organisation, too many partisan organisations, no major umbrella association. (63, f)

Unconscious ghettoisation. (39, m)

Rushing to the UN; too many people of the same type (poets). (46, m)

The idea of Esperanto is transferred too slowly to others. (24, m)

YES – AS A LANGUAGE (EXTERNALLY) (7): *The fact that people are not even acquainted with it, and do not know concretely what it is.* (43, f)

Table 6. Positive sides of Esperanto according to the questionnaire.

Positive sides	Answers (N)
Simple(r) grammar	36
Fast acquisition	29
Neutrality	22
Creative word formation	18
Simplicity	18
Logic	10
International vocabulary	8
No exceptions	5
A phonetic language	5
Making contacts	4
Precision	3
Universality	3
Companionship	3
Interlocutors – esperantists	2
Low prices of courses and textbooks	2
Tolerance of other people and languages	2
Euphony	2
A rich culture	1
Mediation of literary works	1
Spontaneity of speakers	1
Words easy to remember	1
A movement with a noble cause	1
A secret language	1
A rich culture	1
A fast integration in the language community	1
Travelling possibilities	1
A compact language community	1
Cosmopolitanism	1
Possibilities for disabled persons	1
Useful in studying other languages	1
Economy	1
No bad sides	1
Esperanto meetings	1
Openness	1
Openness to neologisms	1
It is the same as other languages	1
The idea	1
A positive idea (non-colonialist)	1
Communication on an equal footing	1
Educated speakers	1
A grammar with more possibilities	1

The only negative side of Esperanto is the prejudice that it is not usable because it is artificial, which I consider nonsense. To me, every language I have learned is artificial. I'll moan, beg, express sudden joy always and only in my mother tongue. (67, f)

YES – AS A LANGUAGE AND MOVEMENT (EXTERNALLY) (5): *No understanding from non-Esperantists. (40, m)*

People sometimes react strangely when they find out that my occupation is Esperanto. (43, f)

People who don't know what Esperanto is see it mainly as unnecessary, and its learning and usage as snobbery. (27, f)

That it is labelled as marginal, sectarian, weird, ideal and unreal. (49, f)

NOT YET (5): *No, not yet. (19, m)*

NO – AS A LANGUAGE; YES – AS A MOVEMENT (3): *I have not encountered negative sides of Esperanto as a language, but as a movement Esperanto occasionally tends to be inward-turning and sectarian. (47, m)*

There are people who propagate Esperanto in a wrong way and thus ghettoise it, that is, make it unattractive to people who are not part of that world. (35, f)

OTHER (2): *Because of little practice Esperantists often stay at the basic level. (47, f)*

YES – AS A LANGUAGE; YES – AS A MOVEMENT: *The needed supplementary terminology (neologisms, language of the professions) is being introduced too slowly, because the Academy [of Esperanto] does not react in an appropriate way. Esperantists have a sectarian attitude about the role of other languages in globalisation. (56, m)*

NO – AS A LANGUAGE: *Even though I'm a woman, I am not affected by the fact that female gender is created by adding the suffix -in. To me, this easily recognisable word of female gender is much easier than it is in many languages with some other word. (57, f)*

In sum, concerning the language, the following negative features were identified: artificiality, rigidity, lack of euphony, chauvinism, a belief in its own logic, too many synonyms and homonyms. Concerning the movement, a considerable number of negative features were identified: too many people of the same type; unprofessional, fanatical and aggressive members; sectarianism and ghettoisation; inertia in the organisation; too many partisan (as opposed to non-partisan) organizations and no major umbrella association as a reason for the idea of Esperanto not being transferred faster; the fact that non-Esperantists are often not acquainted with Esperanto at all or are highly prejudiced about it, often considering it artificial, marginal, sectarian, snobbish, weird, ideal, unnecessary and unreal etc.

The study also set out to find out how the language community perceived the language's success. The data suggest that Esperantists' opinion about the present state of the language is one of dissatisfaction – which also confirms our next hypothesis, that (H39) *Esperanto has failed to become a universal language.*

• **Has the original idea of Esperanto to become a universal language succeeded?**

NO (41): *No. It has become a language of the community of Esperantists and it therefore has a potential to become a language of the European Union. (65, m)*

No, because Esperanto doesn't have adequate international influence for the politics of Esperanto to succeed. (21, m)

Unfortunately, I think it hasn't. We are witnesses that the English language is becoming dominant. (65, f)

No, English has become universal just as Latin was in the Middle Ages. If 'Historia est magistra vitae,' I hope that English will one day become a dead language! (58, f)

NOT YET (18): *Maybe for some future time. (73, f)*

No, it has become the language of a small language community, but its application on the Internet is giving it a new chance. (86, m)

No, but there are those working to make it succeed. Esperantists have never said something like 'we will work on Esperanto for 20 or 100 years, and if it doesn't succeed, we will undo everything and forget it.' (48, m)

NOT COMPLETELY (17): *Not completely, but everyday life shows that success could be achieved. (21, f)*

In a way it has already succeeded because it is possible to use it 'universally,' but, viewed by the number of speakers, no. (24, f)

It depends on what we mean. The language has succeeded; the goals of the movement haven't. (52, m)

YES (11): *Yes, regardless of the fact that it has a small number of speakers. (74, m)*

Yes, because it was accepted by the United Nations as an international language. (24, m)

Esperanto has become an international language, but its breakthrough is prevented by the unnatural intrusion of the English language. (89, m)

Perhaps not in a numerical sense as it was planned, but in every country you can find a group of Esperantists. To me the effort was successful. (27, f)

The participants' explanations for Esperanto not having become a universal language are, as we can see, most often the dominance of English and the inadequate international influence of Esperanto, that is, its unachieved goals. However, Esperantists are glad that it has become a language of the community of Esperantists and are quite positive about its future.

Our last hypothesis dealt with the question of whether Esperanto might become the only official language in the EU. According to our participants, it has been largely confirmed that (H40) *Esperanto should substitute for all official EU languages.*

- **Should Esperanto substitute for all official languages in the EU? Would it be successful in this task? Why?**

YES (40): *Yes, everybody would acquire it equally, everybody would be on an equal footing, and national languages would be preserved. (61, f)*

Yes, Esperanto should become an official language of the EU. Translation expenses would be reduced, as well as domination of strong European countries. (70, f)

ONLY AS A SUBSIDIARY LANGUAGE (21): *It should not replace them, but be used as the bridge language or a subsidiary language. (52, m)*

It would certainly be useful if it were one of the official languages, in that way no other language would be preferred. (55, f)

YES, BUT... (14): *I think that Esperanto could replace all official EU languages successfully, but it should not do this if there is insufficient interest from people – from the EU citizens. (24, f)*

It would be successful, but given the fact that it has no state behind it, no political lobbies, no economic standing, it is difficult to believe that such a thing could happen. (22, f)

I think it would be a good move for the EU, not necessarily for Esperanto. (21, f)

NO (12): *No. The EU's slogan is 'United in diversity' and that should not be changed. (34, f)*

No, because the imposition of a language is not a good way to learn it or widely use it in public. Perhaps the time for language unity has not come yet; Esperanto is still developing. (27, f)

Esperanto should not be an official language of the EU, because the EU is a monarchist and imperialist system and the language would become Eurocentric. (24, f)

If there were no prejudices, vested interests and long-settled habits in the international community, Esperanto would be successful. As things are, it can't be. (49, f)

IT SHOULD, BUT... (4): *It should, but there are problems (England and France have stronger lobbyists), and the EU has no interest in reducing expenses through Esperanto, because more languages mean greater possibilities for manipulation and less transparency. (39, m)*

NOT YET (3): *Not yet, because there are still no competent cadres for such an undertaking. (65, m)*

Participants feel that, if Esperanto is to be substituted for the current official languages, there must be more interest in the language; currently it has no (economic) support, and, according to some, it is not yet ready and is still evolving. Some are sceptical about such a role, given that the EU's motto is 'United in diversity'; they fear that nation states would not accept it, because it would be imposed from outside. According to some, if there were no prejudices and vested interests, Esperanto would be perfect, but, as it is, Esperanto is not right for the EU, because the EU is focussed on only one region of the world and is imperialist at heart. According to others, it could serve only as a co-official language.

CONCLUSION

The main aim of this research was to provide insight into attitudes to Esperanto among the rapidly changing Croatian Esperanto community. The research also dealt with the outlook of the Croatian Esperanto community: it showed that Croatian Esperantists are mainly highly educated people who became acquainted with Esperanto primarily in towns and cities, and that their average age is relatively high (49,28 years). However, since this was a survey of a particular Esperanto demographic, largely connected to the old membership-based model of the Esperanto movement, it cannot be claimed that Esperantists are growing older *in the aggregate*. Many younger Esperantists are likely to have adapted to the new organizational model, the electronic one, which does not demand official membership of any association,

either national or international. This is something which one often loses sight of. For that reason, future studies should also do research on active Esperantists on the Internet whose average age is probably lower and who were largely outside the scope of our study.

In order to get an insight into Esperantists' attitudes to Esperanto, we laid out a series of hypotheses that the researched population was asked to either support or reject. In other words, this survey served very much as an Esperantist opinion poll, reinforcing many of our hypotheses. Concerning the structure of Esperanto, Croatian Esperanto speakers feel themselves more at home with Esperanto than with English, they regard Esperanto as a linguistically Eurocentric language (with an insufficient Slavic element) that is accordingly relatively easy for them to acquire, but, contrary to our expectations, they do not perceive it as having too many neologisms and unnecessary synonyms. It is not seen as a sexist language or too artificial, despite widespread criticism on these points.

Our participants believe that the speech community has managed to create its own original culture, with an adequate number of Esperanto meetings and congresses. Croatian Esperantists feel that they do not have a sufficient number of teachers of Esperanto, and that even some experienced Esperantists have problems with the complete acquisition of Esperanto. Nonetheless, the perspective of a neutral language with a simple and logical structure that makes the acquisition of knowledge possible was among the most positively regarded aspects of the Esperanto phenomenon.

Croatian Esperantists participating in our study believe that anyone can become a successful speaker of Esperanto, but they are uncertain whether prior linguistic training is needed. For them, the fact that Esperanto is a non-national language is an advantage: Esperanto cannot be regarded as redundant even if English is predominant today. Esperanto, they feel, is often not seen as relevant at the international level, in part because it is too little represented in the media. Furthermore, contrary to popular belief, Esperanto is not a threat to the diversity of languages and dialects.

Finally, the Esperantists in the study were not optimistic about the prospects for the international success of the language, though a considerable number of Esperantists think that Esperanto could serve as a substitute for the official EU languages in the work of the EU or become a co-official language.

REMARKS

¹Here we use the term 'natural languages' in order to differentiate those languages from constructed languages such as Esperanto. In some instances we also use the term 'national languages' when we only want to refer to official national standard languages. However, by using the term 'natural languages' we mean both official and unofficial languages.

²Brozović [14; pp.16-17] also does not seem to be very certain about the future of Esperanto, as in his well-known statement: 'Therefore Esperanto will not become the second language of every human being because it is a just and rational solution of high quality; humanity does not do anything for these reasons, but it always tries to solve problems easily and painlessly, without facing unpleasant truths, by some detour or shortcut, with as little effort, costs and risks as possible. It is only when all that has fallen through that one approaches the real solution. Esperanto will win when in the 21st century there is no other solution. And until then – the meaning of the Esperanto movement is to ensure that *lingvo internacia*, the language of Zamenhof, lives, makes progress, takes root and develops, so that the decisive moment does not catch it unprepared' (italics by D. Brozović, translation by K. Puškar).

³Some would, however, take the propaedeutic advantage of Esperanto as a double-edged sword. In particular, it can be maintained that if Esperanto is learnt as the first foreign

language (FL1), children (or even older speakers) could refuse other foreign languages as being too difficult to master. At any rate, children's acquisition of Esperanto has been a matter of continued interest to psycholinguists. Future case studies will most certainly give us more reliable data.

⁴Esperantists strongly hope that Esperanto will become an EU language. The European political party *Europe – Democracy – Esperanto* (EDE, or *Eŭropo – Demokratio – Esperanto*) has devoted intense effort to the introduction of Esperanto as the EU official language.

⁵For an insight into non-Esperantists' attitudes towards Esperanto see [15].

⁶For an example of extensive sociolinguistic research of a national Esperanto community see the analysis of the Czech Esperanto Association (*Ĉeĥa Esperanto-Asocio*) [16].

⁷One person for some reason did not provide an answer to this question.

⁸One person did not provide an answer to this question.

⁹Five male participants did not provide an answer to this question.

¹⁰Numbers in bolded brackets refer to the number of similar answers given by our participants.

¹¹Information in the non-bolded brackets refers to the age and gender of the participant at the time when our study was conducted.

¹²Internally refers to the structure of Esperanto and its movement from an Esperantist point of view, whereas externally (later on) refers to the very same aspects, but from a non-Esperantist perspective.

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