

KRUNOSLAV PUŠKAR

## Common criticism of Esperanto: facts and fallacies

**Resumo (Ofte kritiko de esperanto: faktoj kaj eraroj).** La internacia helplingvo Esperanto estas verŝajne la plej konata planlingvo en la mondo, sed ankaŭ unu el la plej severe kritikataj lingvoj. Kvankam Esperanto celis solvi la problemon de internacia kompreno, kaj laikoj kaj lingvistoj hodiaŭ disvastigas la troan kritikon ke ĝi efektive ne povas fari tion: ili, pro diversaj kialoj, konsideras ĝin lingvistike malsuperan kompare kun siaj denaskaj lingvoj. Kiel rezulto, tiu ĉi artikolo traktas la motivojn malantaŭ la nepopulareco de Esperanto kaj aliaj planlingvoj, konatajn kritikistojn de Esperanto, kaj ofte proponitajn ŝanĝojn al ĝi. Ĝi ekzamenas 16 komunajn strukturajn ‘mankojn’ de Esperanto ĉe la ortografia, fonologia, morfologia, semantika kaj sintaksa niveloj, kaj ĝi ankaŭ provas montri ke ekzistas signifaj sciomankoj malantaŭ la rimarkoj. Ni devas atentigi ke ĉiujn kritikitajn strukturajn trajtojn en tiu ĉi artikolo ni pritraktas objekte kaj science, provante montri ke ĉiujn lingvojn ni povas riproĉi kiel Esperanton. Tamen, ni bone konscias ke naturaj lingvoj ne konformas al la samaj reguloj kaj rimarkoj kiel planlingvoj hodiaŭ.

**Abstract.** The international auxiliary language Esperanto is probably the best known constructed language in the world, but also one of the most heavily criticised ones. Although it was meant to solve the problem of international understanding, there is still widespread and excessive criticism on Esperanto’s account by lay people and linguists alike who think it actually cannot solve it and who, for various reasons, consider it linguistically inferior to their native tongues. As a result, this paper deals with the reasons behind the unpopularity of Esperanto, well-known critics of Esperanto, and widely proposed changes to its most criticised points. It closely examines 16 common structural ‘flaws’ of the language at the orthographic, phonologic, morphologic, semantic and syntactic level, trying to show that there are still significant knowledge deficits behind these persistent objections. It has to be pointed out that all the criticised structural characteristics in this paper are dealt with objectively and scientifically, trying to show that all languages can come under close scrutiny as Esperanto often does. However, we are well aware that natural languages do not conform to the same rules and objections as planned languages still do.

## 1. Introduction

When dealing with criticism of Esperanto, critics usually compare Esperanto to other planned languages or even natural languages which share ‘better’ or ‘more advanced’ language characteristics. Such linguistic features, which ultimately do not meet the expectations of a keen critical eye, are then often called deficiencies or ‘flaws’, and, as a result, the whole language is considered linguistically inferior. According to the principles of descriptive linguistics, this procedure is misguided. In particular, descriptive linguistics<sup>1</sup> pleads for a scientific approach which would explain language features according to the inherent logic of the language itself. This approach is called a bottom-up approach and it deals with every language inductively, explaining it according to its own structural rules and not comparing it to other languages, whether planned or not.

Therefore, the intention of this article is not to compare Esperanto to other languages or to advocate any particular language or language project, as is often the case. It has rather been written as a scholarly presentation of the most common structural criticisms of Esperanto and their argumentation according to the principles of descriptive linguistics.

## 2. Linguistic fact vs linguistic prejudice

When talking about language criticism it is necessary to first discern linguistic fact from linguistic prejudice. Since the mention of planned languages is almost always loaded with various value judgments, so is Esperanto often susceptible to unfair treatment due to the issue of artificiality. As Jespersen (1960: 705) succinctly put it, ‘(...) very much in the so-called natural languages is “artificial”, and very much in the so-called artificial languages is quite natural’ (his quotation marks), but laymen often fail to see the connections.<sup>2</sup> For them, the idea of a planned language always corresponds to the

---

<sup>1</sup> Descriptive linguistics is a scientific study and analysis of languages with respect to their features at a certain point in time. It is contrasted with prescriptive linguistics which seeks not to describe a given feature objectively, but to specify one feature to be used over another or even one variety over the other. Descriptive linguistics has its roots in American structuralism and American linguistics which primarily dealt with the exploration of American Indian languages whose structures could not be explained in prescriptive European terms (which were heavily based on Latin and Greek grammars), but in their own descriptive terms. For that very reason, it was decided to use the descriptive approach to analysing planned languages, in this case Esperanto, because it strongly differs from natural languages, and other planned languages as well, and it deserves to be analysed in its own terms.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. de Courtenay’s (1976: 98-99) conclusion on this point: ‘Alle sogenannten Schriftsprachen (Deutsch, Französisch, Englisch, Italienisch, Russisch, Polnisch usw.) sind zweifelsohne

notion of an imperfect and artificial language,<sup>3</sup> and even the term ‘planned language’ which by far sounds more positive than ‘artificial language’, often gives rise to many preconceived notions owing to the ‘unnatural’ background of such languages.

According to Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (1988: 13), such critics can easily be accused of *linguicism*, discrimination based on language, because of their perpetuation of common misconceptions about planned languages and their unrelenting attacks on these terms. As Zamenhof (2000[1903]: 35) clearly pointed out in his famous treatise *Esenco kaj estonteco*, ‘all of them [i.e. attacks] come from the mouth of people who have no knowledge of artificial languages or have never even seen them’ (transl. by K.P.).<sup>4</sup> Although Skutnabb-Kangas’ term originally referred to linguistic discrimination primarily against languages of minority groups, it can also be applied to the discrimination against Esperanto speakers since they form a kind of language minority, similar in many aspects to other language minorities.<sup>5</sup> As Zamenhof stated already in 1887 in his *Unua Libro*: ‘International Language [i.e. Esperanto], similar to every national one, is a social property’ (transl. by K.P.).<sup>6</sup> In particular, Esperanto is no longer a project: since 1887 it has been a full-fledged language with a sizable and vital language community, a sociolinguistic phenomenon which is highly sensitive when it comes to language issues.

### 3. Esperanto and its critics

Since its inception, the Esperanto community had to learn to defend its language from excessive criticism, mostly riddled either with deficits of knowledge or subjective ideas. It is astonishing that this excessive criticism mainly originated from highly respectable linguists, making it even more difficult to advocate or defend the ideas of an international language to laymen. For instance, Jespersen’s criticism of Esperanto’s orthography, Leskien’s criticism of Esperanto’s difficult pronunciation, or de Courtenay’s criticism of Esperanto’s linguistic sexism etc., clearly show a diversity of criticised linguistic features which for them unavoidably called for serious structural

---

“künstlich” und vom Bewußtsein geregelt, nicht viel weniger als das Esperanto und andere derartige Sprachen’ (his quotation marks).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Piron (1991) for his argumentation on the psychological reactions and defence mechanisms of non-Esperantists when it comes to the mention of Esperanto.

<sup>4</sup> In the original: ‘ĉiuj ili eliras el la buŝo de homoj, kiuj pri lingvo arta havas nenian scion kaj neniam ĝin eĉ vidis (...)’.

<sup>5</sup> Here it is necessary to differentiate between linguistic prejudice and linguistic discrimination: while linguistic prejudice is usually perceived as negative attitudes towards individuals due to the language they speak, linguistic discrimination is seen as negative acts towards those individuals. In the case of Esperanto, the Esperanto community has faced both in its turbulent history (Lins 1988).

<sup>6</sup> In the original: ‘Internacia Lingvo, simile al ĉiu nacia, estas propraĵo socia’.

‘improvements’ mainly according to their individual preferences.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, as Eco (1995: 326) pointed out, ‘especially in the first decades, the Esperanto movement was nearly torn apart by battles raging over proposed lexical and grammatical reforms’, and there were not many linguists at that time who unanimously and officially wanted to side with the language and its structural characteristics, leaving Meillet’s famous remark to stand alone: ‘All theoretical argument is beside the point: Esperanto works’ (transl. by K.P.).<sup>8</sup> Had it not been for Zamenhof who adamantly insisted on the continuity of his language and the Esperanto community determined to reject the proposed reforms, Esperanto would have experienced the fate of many planned projects and eventually landed in the vast landfill of interlinguistic history.

#### 4. To reform or not to reform?

However, Zamenhof knew he had to put an end to constant calls for reform which plagued the progress in the language so he collected commonly criticised features of Esperanto in 1894 in the magazine *La Esperantisto* and offered them up for a vote, cunningly stressing that either all the features are reformed or none at all. Some of the features which were opened up for a vote back then and are criticised even today concerned the change in or total abolition of: the supersigned letters, the article, the marked accusative, the plural with a *-j* ending, grammatical distinctions between adjectives and adverbs, pronouns, verb endings, the number of participles, composite words, correlatives, words not of Romance origins etc. Of course, due to the gravity of the criticised features for the language and the language community, no reform occurred, even though some individuals still called for it,<sup>9</sup> which made now (apparently) stable Esperanto an eligible candidate for an international language.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> For reasons of space, in this paper all the critics and all Esperanto’s ‘defects’ and ‘flaws’ they attempted to cure will not be mentioned, as here only criticism of Esperanto’s linguistic structure will be dealt with. The Esperanto community, culture, literature and other aspects will not be addressed. For argumentation on the comprehensive criticism of Esperanto cf. Francini (1978). Puškar (2015) offers a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the 33 most criticised points of Esperanto in general.

<sup>8</sup> In the original: ‘Toute discussion théoretique est vaine: l’espéranto a fonctionné’.

<sup>9</sup> In 1907, in the wake of schismatic tendencies in the community, Zamenhof made a few proposals to appease the critics: apart from some changes in Esperanto’s word stock, the letter *ĥ* was to be suppressed in favour of *k*, the ending *-aŭ* was to be replaced with the ending *-e*, the accusative was no longer regarded as compulsory, the suffix *-i-* was to be used instead of *-uj-* in the names of countries etc.

<sup>10</sup> As Zamenhof (2000: 45) wrote self-confidently in 1903: ‘for the role of an international language, Esperanto is the sole candidate in the whole world, the only, completely without any rival’ (transl. by K.P.). Compare the original phrase: ‘por la rolo de lingvo internacia Esperanto estas nun la sola kandidato en la tuta mondo, la sola, tute sen iaj konkurantoj.’

In order to ensure that no changes would be made in the language, Zamenhof published the *Fundamento of Esperanto* (Foundation of Esperanto)<sup>11</sup> in the spring of 1905, making Esperanto's foundations – primarily grammar and core vocabulary – binding for all and *netuŝeblaj* 'untouchable'. On 9 August of the same year, at the First World Congress of Esperanto taking place in Boulogne-sur-Mer, France, he pronounced the basis of Esperanto as represented in the *Fundamento of Esperanto* official (the Declaration of Boulogne) and limited future changes to the language core. Also, at the First World Congress of Esperanto, the Academy of Esperanto (originally *Lingva Komitato* 'Language Committee') was founded following the suggestion of Zamenhof, with a task to conserve and protect the fundamental principles of Esperanto and to monitor its evolution.

However, even though Zamenhof's acts seem possessive and authoritative from a certain point of view, he, in contrast to Schleyer and other language inventors, actually relinquished his rights to Esperanto, stressing the importance of the language community and its contribution to Esperanto's further development. In particular, once he had established the foundation of his language, other language speakers could build upon it, according to rules stated in the preface to his *Fundamento*: 'If any authoritative central institution finds that this or the other word or rule in our language is *too inconvenient*, it must not *remove* or *change* the very form, but may propose a *new* form which it will recommend to be used *parallel* with the old form. In time, the new form will gradually push out the old form which will in turn become an *archaism*, as this is seen in every natural language' (his italics) (transl. by K.P.).<sup>12</sup>

As a result, Esperanto remained stable, but due to still unsatisfied adherents another language project was developed in 1907, a reformed Esperanto called *Ido* (Esperanto for 'offspring'), which offered 'improvements' on the features that the Esperanto community obstinately rejected to improve from the very beginning: it offered an invariable adjective, abolished supersigned letters, permitted the accusative case only in inversion, introduced an Italianesque *-i* for the plural marker etc. This language project cost the Esperanto community many adherents who defected to the Ido community, triggering the so-called *Ido Schism*. However, owing to constant reforms, this new language community never took roots in order to pose a serious threat to the Esperanto community. What is more, as David K. Jordan (1997: 44) suggested, 'Ido probably drew reformists out of Esperanto, leaving the movement loyalists it required. Without Volapük to set the stage and Ido to draw away perfectionists, Esperanto might have collapsed.'

<sup>11</sup> The *Foundation of Esperanto* consisted of four parts: a Foreword, a Grammar, a Collection of Exercises, and a Universal Dictionary. It mostly combined Zamenhof's earlier works which were officialised in 1905.

<sup>12</sup> In the original: 'Se ia aŭtoritata centra institucio trovos, ke tiu aŭ alia vorto aŭ regulo en nia lingvo estas *tro neoportuna*, ĝi ne devos *forigi* aŭ *ŝanĝi* la diritan formon, sed ĝi povos proponi formon *novan*, kiun ĝi rekomendos uzadi *paralele* kun la formo malnova. Kun la tempo la formo nova iom post iom elpuŝos la formon malnovan, kiu fariĝos *arĥaismo*, kiel ni tion ĉi vidas en ĉiu natura lingvo.'



## 5. The future of Esperanto

As can be seen, Esperanto went through a long and painful birth trauma. However, as Schubert (1989: 20) pointed out, '[t]he Esperanto which Karl Brugmann, August Leskien, Hugo Schuchardt, Jan Baudouin de Courtenay, and their contemporaries were discussing at the beginning of the century was still in many features a project, while we today can observe a language.' What he actually meant to say is that despite constant criticism and calls for reforms, Esperanto has established a solid standard and a sizable language community to this day, even though it has (still) not achieved the level of success desired. As Blanke (2009: 253) concludes, '[t]he relative success of Esperanto is therefore due to the interaction of various factors, primarily having to do with linguistic structures and with non-linguistic conditions.'

In this paper, the focus will be on common criticisms of Esperanto's linguistic structures which have been perpetuated ever since its invention (cf. Brugmann and Leskien 1907, Collinson 1976, de Courtenay 1976, Francini 1978, Jespersen 1928, Puškar 2015, Trubetzkoy 1976 etc.). Since Esperanto is no longer a mere language project and major changes cannot be made to the language, the (un)purposefulness of those changes today according to the inherent logic of Esperanto will be indicated. The purpose of this paper is not to extol the virtue of Esperanto, but to dispel the myths behind certain criticisms in a scholarly manner. For reasons of space, this paper will not encompass all criticisms – it will focus only on 16 common criticisms (corresponding in number to the 16 basic grammatical rules of Esperanto) that have been encountered in the (inter)linguistic literature, pertaining to the orthographic (one), phonological (two), morphological (five), semantic (six), and syntactic level (two criticised points). These criticisms were analysed according to six principles of a planned language, as formulated by Zamenhof (2000) in the already mentioned essay *Esenco kaj estoneco*, originally published in 1903: economy, flexibility, logic, richness, precision, and simplicity.

## 6. Common criticism of Esperanto

### 6.1. The orthographic level

#### 6.1.1. Six Supersigned letters

The first and perhaps major criticism directed at Esperanto in general is the one regarding its letters with diacritics (*ĉapelitaj literoj*), that is *ĉ, ĝ, ĥ, ĵ, ŝ, and ŭ* (cf. Collinson 1976: 116; de Courtenay 1976: 73-74; Francini 1978: 166). Although Esperanto is written in a Latin alphabet of 28 letters, out of which 22 are widely known, the six supersigned letters mentioned distinguish it from any other language or language project, provoking various reactions to such an unusual look. Possibly the most well-

known reaction to it is the one by Jespersen (1928: 49) who considers these six letters ‘the greatest blunder in the history of auxiliary languages.’ However, it is not perhaps advisable to, as resolutely as Jespersen, simply discard the orthographic innovation made by Zamenhof, for several reasons.

The first reason is its linguistic (especially orthographic) utility. Having established a *one letter – one sound* relationship, Zamenhof succeeded in creating a highly phonetic and orthographically systematised language, the likes of which are not to be found in any other written language system in the world. In particular, Zamenhof was aware that it is by far easier and more economical to write *ŝnuro* with a unigram such as *ŝ* than with a bigram (e.g. *shnuro*) or trigram (e.g. *schnuro*), which are graphically redundant. However, aware of certain orthographic complications at that time, Zamenhof did allow already in his *Unua Libro* (1887) and later in *Fundamento* (1905) the usage of a set of bigrams such as *ch, gh, hh, jh, sh*<sup>13</sup> for *ĉ, ĝ, ĥ, ĵ, ŝ*, which would facilitate the way Esperanto was written, and completely omitting the usage of the unigram *ŭ* at the same time. However, the times have changed and, therefore, the usual criticism that the given Esperanto orthography only complicates writing systems could be considered a fairly outdated criticism since it is now possible to include it easily in all computer programs, as is the case with other languages. In other words, the writing system should always be adaptable to language, and not vice versa.

The second reason in favour of Esperanto’s orthography considers its linguistic identity. Namely, it is more than obvious that a different orthography also supposes a different manner of displaying identity, making it distinguishable among other languages. Since almost every language possesses a distinctive orthography, why should Esperanto be different in this respect? Six non-Latin diacritics (*ĉ, ĝ, ĥ, ĵ, ŝ, ŭ*), which in turn give Esperanto a certain Slavic outlook, make it linguistically only more recognisable. As William Auld concluded in a 1982 decision of the Academy of Esperanto, ‘[t]he orthography of Esperanto is an integral part of the history and culture of the language, and it conforms perfectly to the character of the language. Any orthographic change would only compromise the language and its tradition’ (transl. by K.P.).<sup>14</sup>

Because of its specific orthographic tradition, it is also highly unlikely that the recognition of international words in Esperanto is made difficult (cf. Francini 1978: 166). Once the phonetic values of *ĉ, ĝ, ĥ, ĵ, ŝ*, and *ŭ* are learned, learners instantly know how to pronounce the words *ĉasi, ĝardeno, ĥaoso, ĵaluzo, ŝalo*, and *maŭzoleo*. Here, one can see that many of Zamenhof’s principles of a planned language have been respected.

<sup>13</sup> This method is widely known as the ‘h-system.’ There is also a relatively recent method called the ‘x-system’ (*iksosistemo*), which supposes the addition of an *x* to letters *c, g, h, j, s* and *u* (as in, for instance, *cxapelo, gxirafu, hxaoso, jxurnalo, masxino*, and *bedauxri*), but this method is not as popular due to its unusual outlook: letter *x*, namely, is not a traditional Esperanto letter. However, the Academy of Esperanto has permitted its usage since 2007 in cases where it presents the best technical solution.

<sup>14</sup> See: [http://www.akademio-de-esperanto.org/decidoj/alfabeto\\_kaj\\_ortografio.html](http://www.akademio-de-esperanto.org/decidoj/alfabeto_kaj_ortografio.html).

## 6.2. The phonologic level

### 6.2.1. Lack of euphony

Another issue connected with the criticism of Esperanto is the issue of its linguistic beauty at the phonologic level (cf. Collinson 1976: 119; Puškar 2015: 329). In particular, there are many who do not consider Esperanto equally euphonic as, for instance, Italian or Spanish, due to its alleged phonetic imperfection. Even though there is an unwritten rule concerning planned languages saying that they should always strive for phonetic perfection, and even Comenius himself emphasised that language should be beautiful, it should be pointed out that language euphony is actually a matter of a highly personal opinion. To be more precise, who can have the final say on which language, either planned or not, possesses a higher aesthetic value than the other language? The answer is no one can. The same language can be considered euphonic by a majority of people, but still categorically denied for its linguistic beauty by a minority. There is no universal agreement on the presence or lack of euphony of any language.

The phonological system of Esperanto consists of 29 phonemes: five vowels (*a, e, i, o, u*), one semi-vowel (*ŭ*) and 23 consonants (*b, c, ĉ, d, f, g, ĝ, h, ĥ, j, ĵ, k, l, m, n, p, r, s, ŝ, t, v, z, dz*), making the above mentioned alphabet almost phonemic.<sup>15</sup> Although the vowel inventory is simple, the consonant system tends to present certain difficulties. In particular, one often criticises Esperanto's difficult consonant clusters such as *ekskluzive* 'exclusively', *ekskremento* 'excrement', *ekstra* 'extra' etc., containing up to four consonants within a morpheme. However, these are no clusters intrinsic only to Esperanto: these are actually adaptations of internationally used and pronounceable words. It would be unnatural if Esperanto broke these clusters, because, by doing so, it would make its vocabulary less recognisable.

Another common phonetic criticism mostly concerns initial consonant clusters of basic words which Esperanto also unyieldingly retained, such as *sc*, as in *sceno* 'scene', *scienco* 'science', *sceptro* 'sceptre' etc. However, if Esperanto had changed this two-consonant onset, the words would have lost their international character. What is more, Zamenhof kept complex consonant onsets in some instances in order not to create homonyms in the language, as it was the case with the *kn* initial consonant cluster, as in *knabo* 'boy' or *knapo* 'esquire', which Zamenhof decided to keep regardless of its difficulty for some speakers in order not to have them mistaken with *nabo* 'hub, nave' and *napo* 'turnip', respectively.<sup>16</sup> In other words, Zamenhof tried to be consistent while adapting various words to the system of Esperanto.

<sup>15</sup> An exception to a completely phonological orthography is the affricate /dʒ/ which does not have a special grapheme in the Esperanto orthography. It is written with the digraph *dz*, as in *edzo* 'husband'.

<sup>16</sup> Other 'problematic' and commonly known two-consonant onsets which were retained for the same reasons are the following: *ft-* (as in *ftizo* 'tuberculosis'), *ks-* (as in *ksilofono* 'xylophone'), *kt-* (as in *ktenoforoj* 'ctenophora'), *mn-* (as in *mnemoniko* 'mnemonic'), *pn-* (as in *pneŭmatiko* 'pneu-



Another common phonetic criticism concerns complex consonant clusters in compounds, the most known example being the compound *majstrskribisto* ‘master scribe’, with a seven-consonant cluster. However, it is sometimes forgotten that a compound can be connected with an epenthetic vowel, most commonly *-o-*, which facilitates its pronunciation. Of course, whether one uses this epenthetic vowel or not it largely depends on one’s linguistic background and habits.<sup>17</sup> At any rate, Zamenhof retained an obligatory epenthetic vowel in cases when at a morpheme boundary a) one sound is voiced and the other one is voiceless, such as: *bp* (*skribo-plumo* ‘pen’), *dt* (*ludotablo* ‘playing table’), *fb* (*kafobabilado* ‘chat over coffee’), *vf* (*vivofonto* ‘source of life’) etc., or b) there are two identical consonants, such as: *bb* (*rabobirdo* ‘bird of prey’), *pp* (*kapoparto* ‘part of the head’), *ss* (*ĉasoservisto* ‘servant of a hunter’), *vv* (*vivovespero* ‘twilight of life’) etc. (cf. Kalocsay and Waringhien 1980: 417). By doing so, Zamenhof showed great sensitivity when it comes to language euphony.

Of course, Zamenhof could not have foreseen everything in his language and arranged it in the best possible way. During its more than a century long history, Esperanto’s sound system has evolved in many ways. For instance, the sound *ĥ* [x]<sup>18</sup>, as in *ĥina* ‘Chinese’, has mostly either been replaced by *ĉ* (*ĉina*) or by *k* (as in the word *kemio* ‘chemistry’). Similarly, the semi-vowel *ŭ*, as in *ŭato* ‘Watt’, has been replaced by the consonant *v*. However, the letter *ĥ* is still retained especially at the word onset due to differentiation in case of minimal pairs such as *kolero* ‘anger’ vs *ĥolero* ‘cholera’. Interestingly, the same cannot be said for the sound *ŭ* and its orthographic representation at the word onset which is consistently being replaced by the sound *v* at the expense of potential minimal pairs: *vato* now meaning both ‘Watt’ and ‘cotton wool’. As it will be explained later (section 6.4.6.), Esperanto goes to great lengths to avoid homophones and homographs. In conclusion though, since Zamenhof decided on retaining all consonants in the phonetic inventory, it can be said that he adhered to his principle of richness.

### 6.2.2. Invariance of phonetic values

One other criticism at the phonologi level concerns the invariance of Esperanto phonetic values (cf. Sherwood 1982). In particular, in order to have easily recognis-

---

matic’), *ps-* (as in *pseŭdonimo* ‘pseudonym’), *pt-* (as in *pteropodo* ‘pteropoda’), *sf-* (as in *sfinkso* ‘sphinx’) etc.

<sup>17</sup> However, the insertion of an epenthetic vowel does not occur in verb compounds. Here, if one feels the pronunciation of consonant clusters in verb compounds such as *inkskribi* ‘to write in ink’ or *plenŝtopi* ‘to block completely’ difficult, one can freely express them either adverbially or predicatively (*inke skribi*, *ŝtopi plena*), respectively.

<sup>18</sup> Compare Esperanto *ĥ* [x] with German *Bach*, Czech *chlap*, or Spanish *jota*.

able words, Esperanto does not permit changes in its morphological structure, that is, it consists of invariable morphemes. For instance, the orthographic sequence *kz* in the following words should always be pronounced [kz] and not [gz]:

<i>ekzerci</i> ‘to exercise’	<i>ekzisti</i> ‘to exist’
<i>ekzameno</i> ‘exam’	<i>ekzemplo</i> ‘example’

However, even though voicing assimilation is prohibited, it nonetheless happens in rapid speech, especially common is regressive assimilation when the first consonant adapts to the following consonant. In the following examples, it is evident that regressive assimilation occurs in both cases:

- a) with a voiceless consonant in front of a voiced one: *ekzemple* [egzemple] ‘for example’, *okdek* [ogdek] ‘eighty’ and
- b) with a voiced consonant in front of a voiceless one: *absolute* [apsolute] ‘absolutely’, *subteni* [supteni] ‘to support’.

Although the strict maintenance of Esperanto phonetic values may seem unnatural to many speakers of the language, it is vital that it is retained because of the homophones that can occur if the phonetic values are not respected. This can best be seen on the example of the *s* sound in Esperanto which should be pronounced the same in all situations in order not to create ambiguity with its possible pronunciation as a *z* or even *ŝ* sound, as can be seen in the following examples: *roso* ‘dew’ and *rozo* ‘rose’ or *kas* ‘cash register’ and *kaŝo* ‘hiding’, respectively. Regardless of the fact if ambiguity can occur or not, the phonetic value of the *s* sound should also be maintained after *r* or *n*, as in: *diversaj* ‘diverse’, *kurso* ‘course’, and *pensi* ‘to think’ etc., for otherwise these words would tend to be pronounced as [diverzaj], [kurzo] and [penzi].

Another criticism refers to the intervocalic *j* which fairly regularly appears in words such as *revolucio* [revolutsi<sup>j</sup>jo] or *internacia* [internatsi<sup>j</sup>a]. However, although there is less possibility for the occurrence of homophony at word end, it sometimes does appear, as the following example shows: *gea* [geja] ‘referring to both sexes’ and *geja* [geja] ‘gay, homosexual’. With the clear rule of invariance of phonetic values, Zamenhof complied with his principle of precision.

### 6.3. The morphologic level

#### 6.3.1. Linguistic sexism

Certainly the most known criticism at the morphological level is the one dealing with the apparently intrinsic linguistic sexism in Esperanto (cf. de Courtenay 1976: 87-89; Puškar 2015: 329). In particular, since female nouns in Esperanto are built by adding the suffix *-in-* to the default root, for instance *patrino* ‘mother’ from *patro* ‘father’, it

has been considered pervasively sexist and discriminatory against women to generally conform to such a word-building system. This notion of sexism and discrimination against women in Esperanto is perhaps more expressed today in the era of gender equality than at the end of the 19th century when Zamenhof created the language. However, this made the traditional way of Esperanto's word-formation obsolete due to social changes and in dire need of reforms, as many critics postulated.<sup>19</sup>

Having published his language back in 1887, Zamenhof surely did not give much thought to the issue of gender equality or the role it was gradually going to play in subsequent decades. What he actually had in mind, were the principles of economy and logic in language and how to make them represented to a great extent in his own language. Therefore, when talking about gender representation, Zamenhof succeeded in reducing memory strain which would likely occur if we had to learn two separate roots, one for male and the other one for female (e.g. *patro* and *\*matro*).<sup>20</sup> Having added the German-derived female ending *-in-* to male stems, Zamenhof complied with his own language principles.<sup>21</sup>

Critics, either oblivious or ignorant of these principles, often demand either a separate female root or an additional male affix. For instance, one of the suggestions was the inclusion of the prefix *vir-* denoting male, as in *virbovo* 'a bull', *virhundo* 'a dog', *virkoko* 'a rooster' etc. Even though it was frequently used to denote male animals in early Esperanto, the prefix soon became obsolete due to the fact that it was perfectly possible to express the same male concept without the mentioned prefix, and for that reason it was never included in establishing human relations. Another proposed explicit masculine suffix was the suffix *-iĉ-*, as in *amikiĉo* 'a friend', but it also never took roots owing to the very same reasons above: it is both economical and logical to employ the existing root (*amiko*) as a basis for the male stem than to introduce a superfluous suffix.

In addition, linguistic sexism has also been detected in the usage of the Esperanto prefix *ge-* which represents both sexes taken together. Examples such as *gepatroj* for 'parents,' *gesinjoroj* for 'Mr and Mrs,' and *geavoj* for 'grandparents' are very common

<sup>19</sup> *Riismo* is one such reform proposal, dating back to the 1970s, according to which the pronoun *ri* should replace male (*li*) and female (*ŝi*) pronouns when there is no need to make the sex in the sentence(s) precise. This is somewhat in analogy with the English *their* that is being more and more used. However, since this form is non-canonical, it is highly unlikely that it is going to be accepted.

<sup>20</sup> According to some calculations (Brosch 2015), Esperanto should change approximately 30 roots in order to have a non-discriminatory language. However, if this be permitted, it could trigger additional changes in the system and make it unstable.

<sup>21</sup> There are not many examples of a word originally denoting a female concept in Esperanto, but also representing a male concept after the omission of the female suffix. In particular, the word *fraŭlo* indicating 'a bachelor' has been originally derived from German (*Frau*, *Fräulein*), from which a word for 'a single woman' can be created in Esperanto by simply adding the female suffix *-in-*. Similarly, *edzo* 'husband', *feo* 'male elf' and *kuzo* 'male cousin' were made by the process of back-formation from *edzino* 'wife', *feino* 'female elf' and *kuzino* 'female cousin' by simply omitting the female suffix *-in-*.

in Esperanto, but again considered sexist because of their extensive use of a male stem. It is interesting to note that such a word-building system is also common to some natural languages, for instance, Spanish: *los dueños* ‘masters’, *los Marqueses* ‘marquises’, *los padres* ‘parents’, *los Reyes* ‘kings’, *los tíos* ‘uncles’ etc.

Although in this analysis of Esperanto the attempt is made not to compare it to other languages, comparisons are actually unavoidable. As can be seen, language can have at its disposal both special roots and endings for certain concepts, but it will usually resort to the most economical and logical way of expressing them. These ways, therefore, hardly make Esperanto or any other language an inherently sexist language. According to previous research carried out (Puškar 2015: 329) which dealt with Esperantists’ attitudes to Esperanto, only 2.88% of participants agreed that Esperanto is a sexist language, 87.50% disagreed, and 9.62% were not certain. Additional qualitative research only corroborated this fact, as it can be seen from the following answer by a female Esperantist: ‘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 years female, *ibid.*: 336). Or as Francini (1978: 173) put it, ‘[t]he unisex fashion and especially the convenience clothes both sexes similarly. What makes them distinctive? It is neither the trousers nor the hair style, but, obviously... the content. Exactly as in the following Esperanto words: **patro**, **patrino**; **avo**, **avino**; **profesoro**, **profesorino**...’ (his emphasis) (transl. by K.P.).<sup>22</sup>

Zamenhof was well aware of this fact and for this reason resorted to the principles of economy and logic. It is highly unlikely that while working on Esperanto he actually had the theological-cosmogonic picture of Eve being created from Adam’s rib in his mind and, as a result, came up with the suffix *-in-* which would be then attached to the male stem.<sup>23</sup> However, in spite of plausible arguments against this view, many still obstinately tend to believe it happened exactly this way.<sup>24</sup>

### 6.3.2. Superfluous two-case noun system

Other common criticism of Esperanto concerns the two-case (nominative and accusative) noun system it employs (cf. Brugmann & Leskien 1907: 36).<sup>25</sup> Even though Zamenhof introduced it in order to avoid ambiguity in the language, the compulsory

<sup>22</sup> In the original: ‘La unuseksa modo kaj precipe la oportuneco vestigas simile ambaŭ seksojn. Kio distingas ilin? Nek la pantalonoj, nek la hararangĝo, sed, evidente... la enhavo. Ĝuste kiel en la esperantaj vortoj: **patro**, **patrino**; **avo**, **avino**; **profesoro**, **profesorino**...’.

<sup>23</sup> Compare J. B. de Courtenay’s (1976: 88) view on the suffix *-in-* in Esperanto.

<sup>24</sup> For an overview of debates on linguistic sexism in Esperanto and other (planned) languages, see Brosch (2015), Fiedler (2015a; 2014), and Cramer (2014).

<sup>25</sup> In Esperanto, other case functions are expressed by prepositions and usually occur in the nominative case.

accusative in Esperanto has been actually considered superfluous by critics. In particular, Esperanto uses the *-n* suffix to express a) direct objects or b) the direction of motion, as in the following sentences:

- a) *Li trafis ŝin.* ‘He hit her.’ or *Ŝi trafis lin.* ‘She hit him.’
- b) *Mi iras hejmen.* ‘I am going home.’

Although the direction of motion can also be expressed with a prepositional phrase, for instance *Mi iras al la hejmo*, and in that way without the accusative form, direct objects by contrast must use the *-n* suffix. Naturally, critics would like to dispense with this *-n* suffix for reasons of economy. According to them, it is actually unnecessary for the language because it is difficult to acquire for learners and because its usage does not change anything in the semantics of Esperanto. However, for Zamenhof the usage of the obligatory accusative was considered highly necessary since it functioned well in the languages he learned prior to working on Esperanto. Also, it was considered highly useful due to the fact that his language is an agglutinative one and that by adding a certain affix it can simply distinguish complex semantic-syntactic relations. For instance, if we used the sentences above without the marked accusative, it would be unclear who the agent and who the patient is:

*\*Li trafis ŝi.* \*‘He hit she.’ or *\*Ŝi trafis li.* \*‘She hit he.’

Therefore, since Zamenhof created an agglutinative language, accusativity can manifest itself through morphological case marking and easily distinguish subjects from objects in sentences. This allows greater freedom in the sentence, permitting the object to be placed before the subject or the verb:

*Hejmen mi iras.* \*‘Home I’m going.’  
*Aŭton aĉetis mi.* \*‘A car bought I.’

Therefore, Esperanto is primarily a synthetic language since it displays grammatical relationships in a sentence through inflectional morphemes. In order to be an analytic language, which many critics would want it to be, it should do away with inflections, which is impossible. In particular, this inflection system is considered useful in many ways: it not only allows for syntactic flexibility, but also economy of expression, since it can express complex concepts in one word, as it is the case with the following accusatives:

- a) the accusative of direction: *Li iris ĝardenon.* ‘He went to the garden.’,
- b) the accusative of time: *Li alvenos dimanĉon (je dimanĉo).* ‘He will arrive Sunday (on Sunday).’,
- c) adverbs expressing direction of motion with a verb expressing motion: *Li estas marŝanta suden.* ‘He is walking south(ward).’, and
- d) the accusative of measure: *Ŝi kuris dek mejlojn.* ‘She ran ten miles.’.



It should be pointed out that in spite of the free word order, Esperanto speakers mainly use the SVO sentence structure, leading critics to claim once again that this two-case noun system is actually superfluous. However, despite one major possibility prevailing it is not necessary to eliminate all other language possibilities, because they add to the economy, flexibility, logic, precision and richness of the language. As Janton (1993: 85) concluded, ‘Esperanto can assimilate to itself more structures than any individual ethnic language. In this adaptability lies its true internationality.’

### 6.3.3. Superfluous adjective-noun agreement

However, even though some critics can be persuaded by the previous formulation, most of them completely reject adjective-noun agreement in Zamenhof’s language (cf. Collinson 1976: 122-123). In particular, in Esperanto adjectives end in *-a* (e.g. *malnova* ‘old’) and nouns in *-o* (e.g. *domo* ‘house’), and when they occur together in a noun phrase in the nominative case they do not display any marked grammatical concord:

*Tio estas malnova domo.* ‘This is an old house.’

However, when they co-occur in a noun phrase in the accusative case, they indicate the adjective-noun agreement with the shared accusative suffix *-n*:

*Mi vidas malnovan domon.* ‘I see an old house.’

Also, when it comes to agreement based on grammatical number, the plural suffix *-j* is added to the root always in front of the accusative suffix:

*Mi vidas malnovajn domojn.* ‘I see old houses.’<sup>26</sup>

Of course, critics of Esperanto consider such agreement and Zamenhof’s grammatical consistency completely unnecessary. According to them, there is no need for the adjective to agree with the noun in case and number, suggesting it be left uninflected:

*\*Mi vidas malnova domojn.*

For them, these Greek finals, ‘the *aj*’s and *oj*’s’ of Esperanto, as Jespersen (1928) would mockingly call them, are actually superfluous (cf. Francini 1978: 166). A planned

<sup>26</sup> There is also predicate concord in Esperanto: *La domoj estas malnovaj.* ‘The houses are old.’. Naturally, it is widely criticised and considered superfluous as well. Critics would most likely have this sentence written without the plural marker: *\*La domoj estas malnova.*

language, fit for international communication, should not be burdened with complicated rules of concord, some modern languages, such as English, have already done away with. However, this rule is in no way complicated – it is actually easy because it adds up to the consistency of the language. It is fairly easy for a language learner to remember that adjectives and nouns agree for case and number. What is more, the consistent adjective-noun concord diminishes the possibility of a misunderstanding, the likes of which could arise in sentences similar to the following:

*Mi vidas malnovajn domojn en strato detruita de tornado.* ‘I see old houses in a street destroyed by a tornado.’

The English sentence is dubious as to what was destroyed by the tornado, the ‘old houses’ or the ‘street’, but the Esperanto sentence makes it clear: it is the ‘street’ that was destroyed. If the statement referred to the ‘old houses’, the Esperanto sentence would go as follows:

*Mi vidas malnovajn domojn en strato detruitaj de tornado.*

In Esperanto, the usage of the plural suffix *-j* in adjectives can also indicate the number of entities it relates to:

*malnovaj domo kaj strato* (a house and a street, both old)  
*malnova domo kaj strato* (an old house and a street)

In other words, the plural suffix *-j* in adjectives is used only when it refers to two or more entities in the sentence. Here, as also in the above examples, many of Zamenhof’s principles of language are exemplified, most clearly logic and precision.

### 6.3.4. Derivational non-transparency

Whereas the above criticisms were mainly directed at an allegedly ‘excessive’ consistency of Esperanto, the following criticism deals with its inconsistency at the morphological level due to loanwords (cf. Francini 1978: 181-182). In particular, there are some derivational intransparencies that go against the inherent logic of Esperanto: the author’s analysis of Esperanto vocabulary has shown that in Esperanto many concepts are not derived from an original linguistic material but are borrowed instead. For instance, the word *ambasado* ‘embassy’ did not serve as a basis for the word ‘ambassador’ by adding the suffix *-ist-* (in analogy with *apoteko* ‘chemist’s’ – *apotekisto* ‘chemist’), but another word was borrowed instead: *ambasadoro*, without

any Esperanto suffix. Interestingly, one can find many other examples where different stems are used for semantically related concepts:<sup>27</sup>

*armeo* ‘army’ – *armi* ‘to arm’ (cf. *armilo* ‘arms, a weapon’)  
*bombo* ‘bomb’ – *bombardi* ‘to bomb, to bombard’  
*civilizacio* ‘civilisation’ – *civilizi* ‘to civilise’  
*komisii* ‘to commission’ – *komisiono* ‘commission’  
*konfidi* ‘to confide’ – *konfidenca* ‘confiding’  
*redakti* ‘to edit’ – *redaktoro* ‘editor’ – *redakcio* ‘editorial board’<sup>28</sup>  
*resurekcio* ‘resurrection’ – *resurekti* ‘to resurrect’  
*vagi* ‘to wander’ – *vagabondo* ‘vagabond’

More interestingly, in Esperanto one can easily find two or more words made of a different linguistic material for the same concept:

*komputero*, *komputoro*, *komputilo* for ‘computer, PC’ (cf. *komputi* ‘to compute’)  
*sekretariato*, *sekretariejo* for ‘office’  
*skulptaĵo*, *skulpturo* for ‘sculpture’ (cf. *skulpti* ‘to sculpt’)  
*spontana*, *spontanea* for ‘spontaneous’  
*vipero*, *vipuro* for ‘zool. *Vipera berus*, viper’

These numerous examples clearly show Esperanto’s violation of the principles of both logic and economy, since they are neither derived logically nor do they in any way economise Esperanto’s vocabulary.<sup>29</sup> Here, Zamenhof obviously employed his principle of richness which, according to the 15th rule of Esperanto, allows borrowing of international stems, but to the detriment of its basic vocabulary and inherent word-building possibilities, as it will be discussed later on.

<sup>27</sup> There are many other common examples: *apendico* – *apendicito*, *direkti* – *direktoro* – *direkcio* – *direktorio*, *evolui* – *evolucio*, *inspekti* – *inspektoro*, *organizi* – *organizacio* – *organizatoro* etc. In any event, there are some attempts at making all these forms regular, that is, using the same stem for all parts of speech. However, these non-regular forms are still omnipresent in Esperanto dictionaries.

<sup>28</sup> A similar example would be *taŭro* ‘a bull’ and *toreadoro* ‘a bull fighter’ where we are confronted with two different stems instead of one for a single semantically related concept.

<sup>29</sup> Compare von Wahl’s (1930: 24) criticism on original and regular Esperanto words such as *redaktisto* ‘editor’ and *redaktejo* ‘editorial office’ standing side by side with new and irregular Esperanto words *redaktoro* and *redakcio*, respectively. He admits that even though the newer forms are more international in aspect, being exceptions they only make the dictionary and learning of Esperanto arbitrary and, therefore, complicated. ‘Wo Esperanto international ist, ist es nicht regelmäßig, und wo es regelmäßig ist, ist es nicht international, sondern groteske Willkür’ (*ibid.*)

### 6.3.5. Inconsistently used affixes

Inconsistencies, according to critics (cf. Francini 1978: 174-175), also abound in affixes. The first and most criticised affix is certainly the antonymous prefix *mal-* widely used to denote negative opposites, such as: *alta* ‘high’ → *malalta* ‘low’, *bona* ‘good’ → *malbona* ‘bad’, *juna* ‘young’ → *maljuna* ‘old’ etc. However, even though it is generally very productive and even though one can easily make the opposite concept for almost every lexeme with it, for Leskien (Brugmann and Leskien 1907: 34) this prefix is actually illogical, since its formation rules are highly arbitrary.<sup>30</sup> In particular, de Courtenay (1976: 89-90) asks himself why one cannot build antonyms the other way round: ‘high’ from ‘low’, ‘good’ from ‘bad’, ‘young’ from ‘old’ etc. That is, what are the inherent rules behind its usage?

The truth is, as critics have observed, this prefix is indeed highly arbitrary and illogical since it is also widely used to form positive opposites, such as *malfermi* ‘to open’ and *malpeza* ‘light, not heavy’. Its inconsistency is probably one of the reasons why some loanwords entered the language, such as *aperti* ‘to open’, *basa* ‘low’, *humida* ‘wet’, *mava* ‘bad’ or *olda* ‘old’ etc., without the prefix *mal-*. These loanwords are especially preferred when the prefixed lexeme is far longer than the loanword, cf. *malmultekosta* and *ĉipa* for ‘cheap, inexpensive’. However, according to Gledhill (2000: 121), *mal-* forms are found to be more frequent than their borrowed counterparts, such as: *malfermi* in contrast to *aperti*, *malseka* in contrast to *humida*, *maljuna* in contrast to *olda* etc., which he explains with the fact that they have been integrated better in the language. Also, one can be very creative with these forms by creating nonce words: *malinaŭguro* ‘closing ceremony’, *mallerni* ‘to unlearn’, *malpesimisma* ‘optimistic’ etc. (cf. Piron 1989a: 138-139). This all goes on to show that due to its arbitrariness, the *mal-* prefix is generally quite preferred. As Janton (1993: 64) concludes, ‘[o]f all the derivational prefixes used, the prefix *mal-* is the most original and economical, since it is used to form all opposites (...)’.

Also, there is certain inconsistency as far as suffixes are concerned. For example, the endings used for country names, the official suffix *-uj-* and the unofficial suffix *-i-*,<sup>31</sup> are constantly applied in most concepts (cf. *Kroatujo* or *Kroatio* for ‘Croatia’), however, they are avoided for mostly unexplainable reasons in the following examples: *Brazilo*, *Israelo*, *Kanado*, *Nov-Zelando*, *Peruo*, *Sudano*, *Usono* etc.<sup>32</sup> In short, country names

<sup>30</sup> The most commonly criticised example is the dichotomy *dekstra* ‘right’ – *maldekstra* ‘left’, where the lexeme for left is made from the lexeme for right. Critics ask themselves: what were the reasons behind such a decision? Also, it is unclear why other dichotomies, such as *norda* ‘north’ – *suda* ‘south’, do not employ the antonymy prefix for opposite concepts, when it would actually be cognitally recommendable to do so.

<sup>31</sup> The official suffix *-uj-* was originally used to denote country names, but due to its multiple meanings it has almost lost its place to the more and more popular unofficial suffix *-i-*.

<sup>32</sup> See the Academy’s official list of country names which are only recommendations: [http://www.akademio-de-esperanto.org/oficialaj\\_informoj/oficialaj\\_informoj\\_11\\_2009.html](http://www.akademio-de-esperanto.org/oficialaj_informoj/oficialaj_informoj_11_2009.html).

made with one of those two suffixes are usually called *gentobazaj nomoj* (*people-based names*) because they are formed on the basis of the name of the people. For instance:

*Francoj* ‘the French’ → *Francio* or *Francujo* ‘France’  
*Germanoj* ‘the Germans’ → *Germanio* or *Germanujo* ‘Germany’

On the other hand, country names made without any special suffix are called *landobazaj nomoj* (*land-based names*) and they make up the majority of country names.<sup>33</sup> This arbitrary division existed since early Esperanto and it was employed to distinguish country names which can form a lexeme for their members with the *-an-* suffix from those which cannot. As a result, people-based country names do not make use of this suffix (cf. *Franco* ‘French’, *Kroato* ‘Croatian’, *Polo* ‘Polish’ etc.), whereas land-based country names do (cf. *Brazilano* ‘Brazilian’, *Kanadano* ‘Canadian’, *Usonano* ‘American’ etc.). The fact is that one has to be acquainted with members of both groups in order to know if this suffix is to be used or not.

However, critics ask themselves how it is possible to have two ways of building country names in Esperanto instead of one, which would be more economical. According to the Academy of Esperanto’s decision from 2009, every country name is only a recommendation and is generally valid only if all or the majority of speakers agree with its usage.<sup>34</sup> In case of two or more forms for a country name, one should be more inclined to the international form.<sup>35</sup> In other words, there are, for instance, two names for Korea at the moment: *Koreujo/Koreio* (people-based name) and *Koreo* (a land-based name), but it is actually up to speakers themselves which form they are going to prefer.

Another criticised suffix is the suffix *-il-* which is normally used to form nouns (mostly) from verbs to denote an instrument. For instance, the suffix is added to the verb *ŝlosi* ‘to lock’ to make the noun *ŝlosilo* ‘key’. However, even though highly transparent, it is not consistently used to denote every instrument, probably due to too general a notion this suffix carries: it is present in *aviadilo* ‘aeroplane’ but not in *aŭto* ‘car’, in *kombilo* ‘comb’ but not in *broso* ‘brush’, in *sintezilo* ‘synthesizer’ but not in *gitaro* ‘guitar’, in *tranĉilo* ‘knife’ but not in *kulero* ‘spoon’ etc. For more on this suffix, see section 6.4.4. of this paper.

The last criticised suffix is the suffix *-ec-* expressing an abstract quality or state which is very often confused with the suffix *-o-* mostly denoting concrete notions,<sup>36</sup> as in the following example:

<sup>33</sup> It is a known fact that Zamenhof differentiated these two groups of country names due to their belonging to the Old World (people-based names) and the New World (land-based names). Although his classification is useful and true in the majority of cases, there are many exceptions to the rule.

<sup>34</sup> See: [http://www.akademio-de-esperanto.org/decidoj/landnomoj/listo\\_de\\_rekomendataj\\_landnomoj/index.html](http://www.akademio-de-esperanto.org/decidoj/landnomoj/listo_de_rekomendataj_landnomoj/index.html).

<sup>35</sup> Due to this fact, there are some speculations that both the suffix *-i-* and *-uj-* would fall out of usage since international forms are actually preferred. Since all forms are only recommendations, the actual usage will show if the suffixes will be retained.

<sup>36</sup> There are many other affixes which carry a similar meaning (such as the suffix *-aĉ-* in *hundaĉo* ‘cur’ denoting a defect in quality or condition and the prefix *fi-* as in *fiŝvirino* ‘slut’ denot-



*homo – homeco*: *La homo de pasinteco*. ‘The human of the past’ /  
*La homeco de pasinteco*. ‘The humanity of the past’

As it can be seen, these suffixes are generally not interchangeable without a change in meaning. However, they can sometimes be translated similarly in native tongues, which often accounts for the common misconceptions behind the usage of these suffixes:

*belo – beleco*: *La belo / beleco en ŝiaj okuloj*. ‘The beauty in her eyes.’  
*ruĝo – ruĝeco*: *La ruĝo / ruĝeco en ŝia vango*. ‘The red/redness on her cheek.’

For that reason, the criticism of the suffix *-ec-* is unfounded, even though understandable. However, the following criticism is not understandable (cf. Francini 1978: 179-180). In particular, Esperanto is criticised for the extensive usage of quasiaffixes with no official status, such as *-ion-* (as in *leciono* ‘lesson’), *-ment-* (as in *parlamento* ‘parliament’), *-or-* (as in *aŭtoro* ‘author’), and *-ura-* (as in *natura* ‘natural’) etc. As it can be seen, even though widespread, they are no suffixes whatsoever: they actually play the role of word endings in Esperanto and, therefore, cannot be used in the word building process.<sup>37</sup>

All in all, we can say that the above mentioned suffixes do not employ the principle of logic and precision, but they do add up to the flexibility and richness of the language.

## 6.4. The semantic level

### 6.4.1. Etymons in various forms

This leads us to the criticism that Esperanto makes a non-uniform use of etymons, that is, etymologically related lexemes in various forms. Some of the examples would be the following:

*ĉambro* ‘room’ and *kamero* ‘camera’;  
*kun* ‘with’ and *kom-* as in *kompari* ‘to compare’;  
*lango* ‘tongue (organ)’ and *lingvo* ‘language’;  
*skribi* ‘to write’ and *manuskripto* ‘manuscript’.

ing a defect in morality) and which are, therefore, confusing to a beginner in Esperanto. However, once when Esperanto speakers become proficient in the language, they also become cognizant of the semantic nuances of certain affixes.

<sup>37</sup> They also cannot be used autonomously to stand for concrete words as official Esperanto affixes do, e.g. *-ec* in *eco* meaning ‘quality (of something)’.

According to critics, Zamenhof should have used these etymons in a more uniform way and not employ multiple forms. However, etymons are frequent in every language and, therefore, unavoidable. If Zamenhof had tried to dissect the words at his disposal and look for possible etymons, he would not have published his language project so soon if ever.<sup>38</sup> What is more, a lay person does not even perceive these forms as related etymons. Therefore, this criticism seems to be a bit far-fetched, as well as in the previous example. Here, Zamenhof clearly adhered to his principle of richness in the language.

### 6.4.2. Euro-centric vocabulary

Although Esperanto's grammar is basically not Euro-centric, its vocabulary is. As Janton (1994) suggested, the origin of Esperanto's vocabulary is divided as follows: Romance (including Latin) comprises 80%<sup>39</sup>, Germanic 10%, Greek 5%, and Slavic 5%<sup>40</sup>, making it a convincingly Euro-centric language. For that reason, critics complain of its lack of internationality and an arbitrarily drawn word list (cf. Francini 1978: 176-179; Puškar 2015: 328-329).

As far as the first criticism dealing with Esperanto's lack of internationality is concerned, it has to be pointed out that Esperanto actually is international in character since it is composed of languages which are largely spoken internationally, that is, it employs roots that are international in character to a great extent (Latin, French, English etc.). Of course, many other internationally spoken languages should have been included in Esperanto, but this would be impossible to achieve. There would always be some language missing and the other claimed overrepresented, which is known for being a common problem of *a posteriori* planned languages.

The same would apply to the second criticism dealing with the chosen word list, it is impossible to equally represent words from all included languages. In order to do so, one would have to devise a certain quota system regulating the right number of words from every language, but this is not how language planning works. The words

---

<sup>38</sup> Even if he had managed to give a similar outlook for various etymons, he would have been left with many homonyms, which is something he largely avoided.

<sup>39</sup> It is interesting to note that earlier researches determined a larger extent of Romance lexicon, c. 90% (cf. Corsetti et al. 1980). Whatever the real percentage, as Blanke (2009: 253) put it, an 'overwhelming Romance element' in the planned languages of the twentieth century is actually a reference to the historical influence of Latin. However, it is also a probable indication of what Zamenhof actually wanted his language to sound like.

<sup>40</sup> In an earlier analysis by Janton (1993: 51), 75% Romance, 20% Germanic, and 5% other mostly European lexicon was determined. However, as Blanke (2009: 253) concluded, the percentage of lexical roots depends primarily on the very nature and quantity of the text (everyday language, literary language, technical language), but also, probably, on its source. In particular, the speaker's original language and the word he chooses to use.

Zamenhof chose for the foundation of his language were indeed largely arbitrarily, but they were also chosen according to some principle, mostly to avoid homophony or polysemy, or to increase the internationality of the language (as it will be shown in the following sections). At any rate, as Jespersen (1960: 747) concluded, ‘internationality ought not to be measured by the number of languages in which the word occurs, but by the number of people who through their native language are acquainted with it.’

For that reason, Esperanto is indeed a Euro-centric language, but owing to the fact that it comprises a well-known lexical stock, it is also an international language in its own right. Here, Zamenhof again employed his principle of language richness.

### 6.4.3. Importation of new Stems – profusion of synonyms and loanwords

The first textbook of Esperanto, *Unua libro*, published in 1887, contained some 900 basic roots optimal to hold a conversation in the language. Approximately 115 years later, *La Nova Plena Ilustrita Vortaro de Esperanto* (The New PIV) was published, a 2002 edition of the well-known monolingual Esperanto-*Esperanto* dictionary, consisting of 16,780 words (roots) and 46,890 lexical units, clearly showing how the language has lexically developed over time.

Esperanto’s lexical development was, of course, necessary since the language needed to incorporate new civilisational concepts, especially in view of various technical terms, but it also enriched its literary language to vary expression, making extensive use of borrowing processes. This left Esperanto with three different lexical systems: basic roots, compounds, and borrowed words (commonly known as neologisms).<sup>41</sup> Even though Esperanto is encouraged to borrow ‘international words’, according to its 15th rule, many critics (cf. Francini 1978: 181-182; Puškar 2015: 329) and many Esperantists as well disagree with this fact, expecting from the language speakers to use and make words according to the inherent morphological possibilities of the language (e.g. compounds) and refrain from unnecessary loanwords (cf. Piron 1989b).<sup>42</sup>

However, is borrowing really unnecessary? Can Esperanto really rely solely on its morphological possibilities? Are compounds made from basic Esperanto word stock really as transparent as single-root loanwords? History has shown that many compounds (e.g. *malsanulejo* and *vagonaro*) were widely used at the beginning, but gradually lost their frequency of usage to the morphological simplicity of their borrowed counterparts (*hospitalo* and *trajno*, respectively):

<sup>41</sup> Neologisms represent something different in general linguistics, but in esperantology and Esperanto discourse the term *neologismo* is often used to denote a loanword, that is, not a basic Esperanto word.

<sup>42</sup> According to René de Saussure, one should resort to the so-called ‘law of sufficiency’ which takes into consideration and makes use of only original language material, which is more than sufficient in the word building process.

*mal-san-ul-ej-o* ‘negative-healthy-characteristic-room-noun’ → ‘hospital’  
*hospital-o* ‘hospital-noun’ → ‘hospital’  
*vagon-ar-o* ‘railroad car-a collective group-noun’ → ‘train’  
*trajn-o* ‘train-noun’ → ‘train’

As Gledhill (2000: 120) finds in his corpus analysis, loanwords are generally more widespread than their original compound forms, which he puts down to the complexity of the compound forms in comparison to loanwords (e.g. *profundaĵo* in opposition to *abismo* meaning ‘abyss’) and a difficulty for speakers to interpret them correctly, even though this cannot be ascertained for all lexemes. In particular, some compounds tend to be more transparent and, therefore, more widely used than their borrowed counterpart (e.g. *supreniri* in comparison to *ascendi* meaning ‘to ascend’). It seems that both compounds and loanwords serve their role in the language, the one group being more popular than the other at times, mostly depending on speaker’s preferences.<sup>43</sup> However, whereas compounds encourage creativity in language through its logic, loanwords expand the vocabulary.

As Zamenhof (2001[1903]: 24-25) concludes in his *Lingvaj respondoj*, the ‘pure’ Esperanto forms are not better than the ‘borrowed’ forms. What is more, loanwords are even more natural and they should not be avoided. According to him, the usage will show which roots will prevail. This certainly adds up to Esperanto’s richness of expression (and Zamenhof’s principle of richness), but it does not economise its vocabulary. In particular, one can tolerate one loanword beside its corresponding compound. However, in some cases this sameness is violated, as it can be seen from the following examples, where even three words for the same concept occur:

‘prison’ – *malliberejo*, *karcero*, *prizono*  
‘tape recorder’ – *magnetofono*, *sonbendregistrilo*, *surbendigilo*  
‘aeroplane’ – *avio*, *aviadilo*, *aeroplano*

Here, this profusion of synonyms is in no way to be interpreted as lexical enrichment, but more likely as a lexical burden.<sup>44</sup> Who is to blame? Are lexicographers not doing their job properly? Although variation occurs in every language, it is no wonder it also appears in the complex international community of Esperanto speakers. Complete invariance is virtually non-existent. Therefore, the optimal view would not be to limit variation and discard synonyms (for this is not something descriptivists do), but to have

<sup>43</sup> It is interesting to point out here Piron’s (1989b: 94) fear that this duality of expressions could potentially lead to linguistic snobbery among Esperanto speakers. In particular, he feared that the higher classes would be more inclined to use words of Greek origin, such as *autodidakte* for ‘autodidactic’, whereas the lower classes would use a corresponding word created from a domestic linguistic material – *memlerne*.

<sup>44</sup> In contrast to dictionaries, Esperanto technical terminology has striven for standardisation. According to Wera Blanke (2008: 47), the Terminological Esperanto Center (TEC) is being formed in order to create and ensure a systematic Esperanto technical terminology.

a dictionary which would also suggest and recommend one lexeme over the other. In particular, some lexemes are already archaic, some are almost limited to the literary or some other field etc. Complete synonymy is also virtually non-existent.

It seems that there are two camps inside and outside the Esperanto community: the proponents of schematicity (*ŝhemismo*), who prefer to create new concepts by way of basic vocabulary and in the form of compounds, and the proponents of naturalism (*naturalismo*), who rather rely on borrowing in order to enrich the vocabulary. The truth is that both strategies, the endogenous (compounds) and exogenous (loanwords) strategy, have their pros and cons, and are in no way mutually exclusive, as some might like them to be. They are more likely complementary. In particular, whereas the exogenous strategy makes the language acquisition for European language learners somewhat easier, the endogenous strategy might facilitate the language learning process for non-Europeans.<sup>45</sup> The only thing that should be regulated in Esperanto dictionaries is, again, the number of official synonyms for one concept. As long as this is not solved, there will always be a heated debate concerning this subject.

#### 6.4.4. Vocabulary imprecision

Another criticism in Esperanto which comes to the fore is the problem of considerable imprecision when it comes to certain vocabulary, mainly with the following two suffixes: *-ej-* (de Courtenay 1976: 90; Francini 1978: 171) and *-il-* (Francini 1978: 174).

The suffix *-ej-* denotes a room or a place determined for something. For instance, *juĝejo* indicates ‘a court (room)’, *kuirejo* indicates ‘a kitchen’, and *vendejo* ‘a store’, all of them being more or less transparent in what they represent. However, lexemes such as *preĝejo* indicating ‘a place where one prays’ and *lernejo* indicating ‘a place where one studies’ are often confusing for learners of Esperanto since they are semantically too general. In fact, it is actually impossible for them to signify something specific, thus serving as a sort of umbrella term. In particular, even though *preĝejo* today also indicates ‘a Christian place where one prays’, when one wants to be more specific, one should then use *baziliko* ‘basilica’, *kapelo* ‘chapel’, *katedralo* ‘cathedral’, *kirko* ‘church’, *moskeo* ‘mosque’, *pagodo* ‘pagoda’, *sinagogo* ‘synagogue’, *templo* ‘temple’ etc. The same goes for *lernejo*: one should be more inclined to use *gimnazio* ‘high school’, *instituto* ‘institute’, *kolegio* ‘college’, *liceo* ‘lyceum’, *seminario* ‘seminar’ etc. in order to be clear.

The suffix *-il-* denotes an instrument, e.g. *pafilo* ‘a gun’, *sidilo* ‘a seat’, *skribilo* ‘a pen’, and is also criticised due to being too general. As in the above example, one

<sup>45</sup> It is actually debatable to what degree Esperanto compounds are easier for non-European Esperanto speakers than loanwords. Since English is today more or less widespread, non-Europeans (e.g. Chinese and Japanese) may find loanwords much easier, e.g. *ĉipa* in contrast to *malmultekosta*. This issue should be researched as soon as possible.



must resort to more specific lexemes when one wants to be clear, such as *fusilo* ‘rifle’, *kanono* ‘cannon’, *revolvero* ‘revolver’ for ‘a gun’, *brakseĝo* ‘armchair’, *kanapo* ‘couch; sofa’, *seĝo* ‘chair’ for ‘a seat’, and *fontoplumo* ‘fountain pen’, *krajono* ‘pencil’, *plumo* ‘pen’ for ‘a pen’. Instead of using a word with this suffix, one can also make a compound word which will inherently be more specific: e.g. *kovrotuko* ‘curtain’, *presaparato* ‘printing machine’, *segmaŝino* ‘sawing machine’, *vendaŭtomato* ‘vending machine’ etc.

As Blanke (1979: 139) pointed out, various words in Esperanto show a different scale of transparency, such as *necesejo* ‘a place for necessity, a toilet’ and *tranĉilo* ‘a knife’, where the suffix *-il-* seems to be more transparent than the suffix *-ej-*. However, this is only in this example. As shown above, *preĝejo*, since it also denotes a Christian place for praying, tends to be more specific than, for example, *skribilo*, which is somewhat general as an instrument for writing. This does not mean that Esperanto vocabulary is imprecise, it actually means that these suffixes serve, first and foremost, as umbrella terms, but some of them have managed to obtain a higher grade of motivation and transparency in the process, probably owing to their immense frequency of usage. Therefore, these suffixes are of great use at the beginning of Esperanto study, but higher the proficiency, more specific lexemes are incorporated in the language learning process. Even though Zamenhof’s principles of economy, logic, precision etc. are violated here, the principle of richness is nevertheless present.

#### 6.4.5. Slavic and Germanic semantics

When it comes to semantic transparency, a predominant criticism is that the semantic system of Esperanto is too based on Slavic and Germanic semantics. In particular, even though many Esperanto words appear in several Indo-European language families, they do not share the same meanings. This is quite natural. While diligently working on his language, Zamenhof borrowed only one meaning which he considered the most fitting. Perhaps the most common example of a semantic borrowing that Zamenhof incorporated in Esperanto is the word *plena* meaning ‘full’ as it often occurs in the syntagm *plena vortaro* meaning a ‘complete dictionary’ (literally ‘full dictionary’), according to the Russian *polnyj slovar* (полный словарь). Here, the question arises as to why in a lexically predominately Romance language one should not be more inclined to the Slavic and Germanic elements which were to a great extent neglected while creating Esperanto.

In order to increase the Slavic and Germanic share in his language, Zamenhof also adapted Esperanto’s word-building system to Slavic and Germanic semantics, making the following expressions possible: *trinkmono* ‘tip, extra money’ (Ger. *Trinkgeld*), *bonvena* ‘welcome’ (Ger. *willkommen*), *gefratoj* ‘brothers and sisters’ (Ger. *Geschwister*), *eldoni* ‘publish’ (Cro. *izdati*), *prizorgi* ‘to see about sb/sth’ (Cro. *pobrinuti se*), *foriri*

‘to leave, depart’ (Cro. *otići*, Ger. *weggehen, fortgehen*), *elkuri* ‘to suddenly run out of a place’ (Cro. *istrčati*, Ger. *herauslaufen*), *ekami* ‘to start loving sb/sth’ (Cro. *zavoljeti*), *alveturi* ‘to travel from one place to another by a vehicle’ (Cro. *dovesti se, doputovati*, Ger. *anreisen, ankommen*), *plifortigi* ‘to make sth more stronger’ (Cro. *ojačati*, Ger. *erstarken*) etc. Although difficult to acquire for non-Slavic and Germanic speakers, these expressions make use of endogenous word-building, which adds up to the complexity of Esperanto, making it, as Lindstedt (2009: 131) pointed out, ‘an East European contact language with Romance lexifiers and Slavonic and Yiddish substrates.’

However, because of the heavily reliance on Slavic and Germanic semantic systems, Esperanto has been further accused of not showing any semantic autonomy of its own, especially in the field of phraseology. In particular, the following expressions feature prominently in the language: *altiri atenton* ‘draw attention’, *fari demandon* ‘to pose a question’, *ĵeti rigardon* ‘to throw a look’, *preni en konsideron* ‘to take into consideration’, *tiri konkludon* ‘to draw a conclusion’, *ludi ŝlosilan rolon* ‘to play a key role’, *porti la titolon* ‘carry a title’, *krokodilaj larmoj* ‘bitter tears’, *la malvarma milito* ‘the Cold War’ etc. However, the mentioned expressions took roots in the language very much due to its internationality and not due to Esperanto’s lack of semantic autonomy. Concerning Esperanto phraseology, Fiedler (2015b: 252-253) distinguished three groups of phraseological units on the basis of their origin:

- a) loan translations and ad hoc loans from various other languages, such as: *mano manon lavas* ‘one hand washes the other’ (cf. Latin *manus manum lavat*), *enverŝi oleon en la fajron* ‘to add fuel to the fire’, *mono ĵetita al la vento* ‘money down the drain’, which make up the quantitatively largest group.
- b) planned phraseological units, mostly made by Zamenhof himself, such as: *Ĉio transmara estas ĉarma kaj kara*. ‘Everything beyond the ocean/far away is charming and dear’. or *Neniu estas profeto en sia urbeto*. ‘No one is a prophet in their own town.’
- c) and original phraseological units from the Esperanto community, such as: *esperanto – edzperanto* ‘Esperanto – husband-provider/matchmaker’, *Ne krokodilu!* lit. ‘Don’t be a crocodile! = Don’t speak other languages while around Esperanto speakers! etc.

As it can be seen, other languages greatly influenced Esperanto at the semantic level, but owing to its long tradition, many expressions also originated in the Esperanto community, which testifies to its autonomy but also creativity: *samideano* ‘fellow-idealist’, *Esperantujo* ‘Esperantoland, a community of Esperanto speakers’, *rondo familia* ‘family circle’, *kabeisto*<sup>46</sup> ‘someone who leaves the movement’, *verda papo* ‘green pope, someone who is always preaching about the ideals of Esperanto’ etc. Since it is to a great deal a language movement, language notions such as *denaskulo*

<sup>46</sup> The very notion *kabei* was created according to the initials of Kazimierz Bein (1872-1959), a Polish ophthalmologist, and a prominent Esperanto author, translator and activist, who in 1911 without explanation left the Esperanto movement. The fact that this expression has remained in use in the whole Esperanto community testifies to the movement’s sensitiveness to the loss of (prominent) members.

‘native speaker’, *eterna komencanto* ‘eternal beginner’, *krokodili* ‘to speak one’s own language in an Esperanto environment’ and *aligatori* ‘to speak a third language (not one’s own, not Esperanto) in an Esperanto environment’ also abound, clearly indicating Zamenhof’s principle of language richness.

#### 6.4.6. Ambiguities

Owing to the fact that Esperanto is both a morphologically and semantically rich and complex language, it is not surprising that homonymy and polysemy also play a significant role in the language, often giving rise to ambiguities to which critics tend to object (cf. Francini 1978: 184-186). The first group of ambiguities are words that are written or pronounced similarly (homonyms), but usually display a significant difference in meaning: *diamant-o* ‘diamond’ – *di-am-ant-o* ‘god lover’, *radar-o* ‘the radar’ – *rad-ar-o* ‘a set of tyres’, *sent-em-a* ‘sensitive’ – *sen-tem-a* ‘without a subject, topic’, *veter-o* ‘weather’ – *vet-er-o* ‘part of a bet’ etc. Of course, as in every language, ambiguities are also difficult to avoid in Esperanto and they will always occur. However, since there is always a certain context in every sentence, it is fairly easy to discern what the discourse is actually about.

The same goes for international words that mean different things in different languages and which also cause misunderstandings for certain Esperanto speakers, mostly at the basic level. It is a known fact that such kinds of false friends exist in every language and are, thus, also unavoidable in Esperanto:

*embarasi* ‘to jam, obstruct’ – *hontigi* ‘to embarrass’  
*kalumnio* ‘slander’ – *libelo* ‘a dragonfly’  
*novelo* ‘a short story’ – *romano* ‘a novel’  
*preciza* ‘accurate’ – *akurata* ‘punctual’  
*rento* ‘dividend income’ – *lupago* ‘a rent’

In fact, Zamenhof went to great lengths to eliminate such ambiguities from his language that he in turn created some more:

*humoro* ‘spirit’ – *humuro* ‘humour’  
*litero* ‘letter, a grapheme’ – *letero* ‘letter’  
*nacia* ‘national’ – *nazia* ‘Nazi’  
*prezidanto* ‘president of a society, a club’ – *prezidento* ‘president of a state’

In particular, by trying to avoid polysemy in his language, Zamenhof also managed to create a profusion of paronyms, or etymologically related lexemes with a difference in meaning. Even though the meaning of a lexeme became then more specified, the memory strain also became greater for those trying to learn these words, making them

popular Esperanto *confusibles*. (Compare also the well-known *akordi* ‘to agree’ vs *agordi* ‘to tune’, *germana* ‘German’ vs *ĝermana* ‘Germanic’, *trinki* ‘to drink’ vs *drinki* ‘to drink alcoholic beverages’ etc.) What is more, in some instances, Zamenhof even used four-five paronyms in his effort to avoid multiple meanings, as evident in the following words: *procedo* ‘procedure’, *proceduro* ‘procedure’, *proceso* ‘trial’, *procesio* ‘procession’, and *procezo* ‘process’ or *tablo* ‘table’, *tabelo* ‘table of contents’, *tabulo* ‘(black)board’, and *tavolo* ‘layer’. Interestingly enough, Zamenhof (2000: 44) criticised Volapük for having many similar and in effect confusing words.

Also, in order to avoid coincidental forms of a lexeme and morpheme, here in order to avoid congruence with the suffix *-et-* meaning ‘small’, Zamenhof created many words which show little resemblance to the original word, such as: *bankedo* ‘banquet’, *cigaredo* ‘cigarette’, *kasedo* ‘cassette’, *planedo* ‘planet’, *rakedo* ‘rocket’ etc. One could go on with many more examples. However, it is already more than obvious from the examples above that by adhering to his principle of richness and precision, he violated his principles of economy and simplicity, having made the vocabulary of his language more complex than it perhaps ought to have been.

## 6.5. The Syntactic level

### 6.5.1. The definite article

Esperanto makes use of two articles: the zero and the definite article. The zero article (1) denotes indefiniteness while in front of a noun, whereas the definite article (2) is used to specify the presence or absence of the known referent in a sentence. For instance,

- (1) *domo* = *a/some house* (i.e. a house unknown to the speaker or interlocutor)
- (2) *la domo* = *the house* (i.e. the house known to the speaker or interlocutor)

Critics (cf. Collinson 1976: 120) usually criticise the usage of only one article in Esperanto – the definite article – because it is generally perceived as superfluous. According to Zamenhof, the role of this mainly invariant article *la*<sup>47</sup> is to serve as a determiner to the noun phrase, denoting persons or things mentioned or somehow implied in a sentence or discourse. By doing so, it facilitates the overall discourse

<sup>47</sup> For certain reasons, mostly in Esperanto literature, the article *la* can be shortened to *l'* in front of a noun. It is also possible for the definite article to be shortened in book titles (such as, *La batalo de l'vivo*, *La trezoro de l'oraĵisto*, *Libro de l'humoraĵo* etc.) with the final vowel elided either in front of a vowel or a consonant. For the usage of the definite article, compare the 16th rule of Esperanto.

comprehension. In order to exemplify this, we will enumerate only some of the major usages of the definite article:

- a) the usage of the definite article can be anaphoric, with *la* referring to a previously mentioned item:

*Hieraŭ nekonata persono rabis bankon en Novjorko. La ŝtelisto ŝtelis du milionojn da eŭroj!*

‘Yesterday, an unknown person robbed a bank in New York. **The** thief stole 2 million euros!’

- b) Esperanto makes use of the definite article also in a cataphoric sense by referring to something which follows later in the discourse, usually as part of a relative clause (1) or part of a prepositional phrase (2):

(1) *Tiu estas la filmo, kiun vi devas spekti.* ‘This is the film you have to watch.’

(2) *Kiu estas la nomo de la lernejo?* ‘What is the name of the school?’

- c) the reference of the definite article can also be situational in Esperanto. In particular, *la* often occurs when an entity is known from the situation: either in the immediate situation (1) or in the wider situation (2) for which knowledge of both the speaker or the interlocutor is implied:

(1) *Ĉu vi aŭdas la bruon?* ‘Do you hear the noise?’ (immediate situation)

(2) *Ĉu vi ŝatus renkonti la prezidentinon?* ‘Would you like to meet the president?’ (wider situation)

At the end, one should ask oneself if the above mentioned criticism is justified? Should Esperanto do away with the definite article? When one only reads the above mentioned sentences without the definite article in a sense that is indefinite, one realises that the usage of the definite article in Esperanto is actually obligatory. Without it, the interlocutor is faced with dubious sentences and has to ask for clarification.<sup>48</sup> For that very reason, it is clear that the definite article is needed in the language. It also complies with Zamenhof’s principles of logic and precision.

### 6.5.2. Irregular (in)transitivity

The final criticism, as Kiselman (1995: 24) pointed out, ‘is about a grammatical field where Esperanto seems to be as irregular as many other, natural languages. In particular, it deals with the irregular transitivity and/or intransitivity of some Esperanto

<sup>48</sup> A similar structure is to be observed in the Welsh language which makes use of the zero article and three forms of the definite article.



verbs, which is also sometimes a subject of criticism, even though not to the extent as the previously mentioned language features. What is more, this problem is not even known to the majority of Esperanto speakers, since it concerns on the whole a minority of verbs, many of which speakers encounter only at higher levels of language learning.<sup>49</sup>

In short, Esperanto differentiates transitive (with an object) from intransitive (without an object) verbs. In Esperanto, a transitive lexeme is usually made intransitive by adding the anti-causative suffix *-iĝ-*. For instance, *fini* – *finiĝi* ‘to finish’ and *komenci* – *komenciĝi* ‘to begin’. Also, an intransitive lexeme is made transitive by adding the causative suffix *-ig-*. For instance, *ĉesi* ‘to stop’ – *ĉesigi* ‘to make sth stop’ and *daŭri* ‘to continue’ – *daŭrigi* ‘to make sth continue’. Apart from the fact that some Esperanto speakers tend to use *finigi* instead of *fini* or *daŭrigi* instead of *daŭri*, the story here is still more or less logical.

What makes the picture more complex, however, are some transitive verbs which can occur either with or without the object (see the example below), such as the following: *dolori* ‘to hurt’, *fumi* ‘to smoke’, *kuiiri* ‘to cook’, *legi* ‘to read’, *manĝi* ‘to eat’, *regi* ‘to rule’, *respondi* ‘to respond’, *trinki* ‘to drink’, which additionally only complicate the system. Here, both the causative suffix *-ig-* and the anti-causative suffix *-iĝ-* rarely or never occur.

*Mi fumas tro multe.* ‘I smoke too much.’ (intr.)

*Mi fumas pakon da cigaredoj ĉiutage.* ‘I smoke a package of cigarettes every day.’ (tr.)

Another category of verbs are those which can be both transitive and intransitive, regularly with a difference in meaning: *bati* ‘to beat’, *blovi* ‘to blow’, *cedi* ‘to give up’, *pasi* ‘to pass’ etc.

*Mia apetito jam pasis.* ‘I have already lost my appetite.’ (intrans.)

There is also a category of verbs which can either appear with the accusative case or with a certain preposition without any change in meaning. These are: *helpi (al)* ‘to help’, *kredi (je)* ‘to believe’, *ludi (per)* ‘to play’, *memori (pri)* ‘to remember’, *odori (je)* ‘to smell’, *partopreni (en)* ‘to participate’, *profiti (de/el)* ‘to profit’, *sekvi (post)* ‘to follow’ etc. Here, one must either know the right property of the verb or the right preposition which follows it in order to use it correctly:

*Ŝiaj haroj odoris cinamon / je cinamo.* ‘Her hair smelt like cinnamon.’

As it can be seen, the category these verbs were allocated is arbitrary to a great extent, but it is hard to agree with the common claim that the certain category of a verb is irregular. The fact that the category of the verb *boli* (intrans.) ‘to boil’ does not correspond with the category of the same verb in English or another language, does

<sup>49</sup> It is interesting to point out that the subject of the irregular (in)transitivity in Esperanto is not even dealt with in more comprehensive Esperanto grammars.

not mean that it is instantly irregular. Although it presents a certain learning load for learners, the verb system of Esperanto shows order. One only has to become aware of its classification with respect to (in)transitivity. Here, one can identify Zamenhof's principles of flexibility and richness.

## 7. Instead of Conclusion

This paper has tried to shed light on the most common linguistic features of Esperanto which have been criticised since its inception. Relying on the principles of descriptive linguistics, an overview of 16 common criticisms was given according to their corresponding linguistic level of analysis and a concise objective discussion thereof. (Of course, due to the complexity of the topic, one could write 16 more papers, one for every criticised feature at the very least.)

In this analysis, as far as linguistic levels are concerned, there was altogether one criticised point at the orthographic level, two criticised points at the phonological level, five at the morphological level, six at the semantic level, and two criticised points at the syntactic level. These criticised Esperanto features were analysed through the prism of six principles of a planned language as formulated by Zamenhof: economy, flexibility, logic, richness, precision, and simplicity. The analysis has shown that one can identify almost all of Zamenhof's principles behind the criticised points, but also clashes between them. In particular, the principle of richness comes to the fore in points where it actually violates all other principles. To be more precise, Esperanto uses suffixes inconsistently, imports new roots, consists of imprecise (intransparent) vocabulary, where the principle of richness is given more attention than the principles of economy, logic, precision etc.

On the basis of those criticised points, this paper has also shown that Esperanto cannot be reformed to the extent critics would like it to be, but it can evolve and is evolving, having become more simplified in some aspects, but also more complex in others. The *Foundation of Esperanto* and the 15<sup>th</sup> rule of grammar give Esperanto a steady basis for its development. As Koutny (2015: 246) concluded, Esperanto has 'matured into an autonomous linguistic system which continues to develop in an international speech community.' Due to its unique linguistic features, which have been analysed in this paper, and its unique language community, Esperanto has become a *sui generis* language.

Because of its distinctive outlook, further research should also be more inclined to highlight the difference between linguistic facts and linguistic prejudice. Since Esperanto has a sizable and vital language community, more research should be carried out based on its opinions concerning certain language issues. By doing so, linguistic prejudice behind common criticisms of Esperanto could be reduced. Because, as Francini (1978: 13) would say in his time, 'it is easier to tear down the Berlin wall than to eliminate prejudices.'<sup>50</sup> For

<sup>50</sup> In the original: 'elimini antaŭjuĝojn estas pli malfacile ol faligi la Berlinan muron.'

that reason, it is the task of both esperantology and interlinguistics to try to scientifically prove or disapprove the prejudices in question. As Blanke (2009: 260) concluded, ‘[t]he present and future position of Esperanto depends on relatively broad scholarly analysis and description of the language’, with which this author wholeheartedly concurs. It is to be hoped that this paper has succeeded in being an incentive for other linguists to also deal with the criticism of Esperanto in the future in a scholarly manner.

## Bibliography

- Blanke, Detlev 1979: Motivado de la signifo de esperantaj vortoj. In: Detlev Blanke (ed.): *Esperanto, la internacia lingvo: sciencaj aspektoj*. Berlin: Kulturligo de GDR, Centra Laborrondo Esperanto, 135-144.
- Blanke, Detlev 2009: Causes of the relative success of Esperanto. In: *Language Problems and Language Planning* 33(3): 251-266.
- Blanke, Wera 2008: *Esperanto – Terminologie und Terminologearbeit*. New York: Mondial.
- Brosch, Cyril 2015: Seksa egaligo en la lingvo – laŭfundamente. In: *Lingva Kritiko. Studoj kaj notoj pri la Internacia Lingvo. Esperantologio Interreta*. <http://lingvakritiko.com/2015/01/31/seksa-egaligo-en-la-lingvo-laufundamente/>.
- Brugmann, Karl & Leskien, August 1907: *Zur Kritik der künstlichen Weltsprachen*. Straßburg: Verlag von Karl J. Trübner.
- Collinson, W.E. 1976: Esperanto und seine Kritiker. Eine Prüfung einiger idistischer Einwände. In: Reinhard Haupenthal (ed.): *Plansprachen. Beiträge zur Interlinguistik*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 113-132.
- Corsetti, R. & La Torre, M. & Vessella, N. 1980: Pliriĉigo de la morfemaro en Internacia Lingvo. In: István Szerdahelyi (ed.): *Miscellanea interlinguistica*. Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó, 368-379.
- Courtenay, J. Baudouin de 1976: Zur Kritik der künstlichen Weltsprachen. In: Reinhard Haupenthal (ed.): *Plansprachen. Beiträge zur Interlinguistik*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 59-110.
- Cramer, Marcos 2014: Esperanto kaj sekso. In: *Lingva Kritiko. Studoj kaj notoj pri la Internacia Lingvo. Esperantologio Interreta*. <http://lingvakritiko.com/2014/10/16/esperanto-kaj-sekso/>.
- Eco, Umberto 1995: *The Search for the Perfect Language*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Fiedler, Sabine 2014: Geschlecht im Esperanto. Eine sprachwissenschaftliche Betrachtung zu genderspezifischen Bezeichnungen in einer Plansprache. In Cyril Brosch and Sabine Fiedler (eds.): *Interlinguistik im 21. Jahrhundert. Beiträge der 23. Jahrestagung der Gesellschaft für Interlinguistik e.V., 29. November 2013 - 01. Dezember in Berlin*. Berlin: Gesellschaft für Interlinguistik e.V. (Interlinguistische Informationen, Beiheft 21), 85-106.
- Fiedler, Sabine 2015a: Esperanto. Gender in a planned language. In: Marlis Hellinger and Heiko Motschenbacher (eds.): *Gender Across Languages. Volume 4*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 97-123.
- Fiedler, Sabine 2015b: Esperanto phraseology. *INDECS* 13(2): 250-263.
- Francini, Walter 1978: *Esperanto sen antaŭjuĝoj*. Rio de Janeiro-São Paulo: Kultura Kooperativo de Esperantistoj, San-Paŭlo Esperanto-Asocio.
- Gledhill, Christopher 2000: *The Grammar of Esperanto: A Corpus-based Description*. München: Lincom Europa.
- Janton, Pierre 1993: *Esperanto: Language, Literature, and Community (ed. by Humphrey Tonkin)*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

- Janton, Pierre 1994: *L'Espéranto. Que sais-je?*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Jespersen, Otto 1928: *An International Language*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Jespersen, Otto 1960: *Selected Writings of Otto Jespersen*. London-Tokyo: George Allen & Unwin, Senjo Publishing Co.
- Jordan, David K. 1997: Esperanto and Esperantism: Symbols and Motivations in a Movement for Linguistic Equality. In: Humphrey Tonkin (ed.): *Esperanto, Interlinguistics, and Planned Language*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 39-65.
- Kalocsay, Kálmán, Waringhien & Gaston 1980: *Plena analiza gramatiko de Esperanto*. Rotterdam: Universala Esperanto-Asocio.
- Kiselman, Christer O. 1995: Transitivaj kaj netransitivaj verboj en Esperanto. In: Petr Chrdle (ed.): *La Stato kaj Estonteco de la Internacia Lingvo Esperanto*. Praha: Kava-Pech, 24-40.
- Koutny, Ilona 2015: Can complexity be planned? In: *INDECS* 13(2): 236-249. [http://indecs.eu/2015/indecs\\_13\\_2.pdf](http://indecs.eu/2015/indecs_13_2.pdf)
- Lindstedt, Jouko 2009: Esperanto – an East European Contact Language? In: Christian Voß and Alicja Nagórko (eds.): *Die Europäizität der Slawia oder die Slawizität Europas. Ein Beitrag der kultur- und sprachrelativistischen Linguistik (Studies on Language and Culture in Central and Eastern Europe, 2)*. München – Berlin: Otto Sagner, 125-134. [https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/25664/Lindstedt\\_2009\\_Contact.pdf](https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/25664/Lindstedt_2009_Contact.pdf)
- Lins, Ulrich 1988: *Die gefährliche Sprache. Die Verfolgung der Esperantisten unter Hitler und Stalin*. Gerlingen: Bleicher.
- Piron, Claude 1989a: A few notes on the evolution of Esperanto. In: Klaus Schubert (ed.): *Interlinguistics: aspects of the science of planned languages*. Berlin – New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 129-142.
- Piron, Claude 1989b: *La bona lingvo*. Vieno: Pro Esperanto.
- Piron, Claude 1991: Psikologiaj reagoj al esperanto. In: William Auld (red.): *Nova Esperanta Krestomatia*. Rotterdam: Universala Esperanto-asocio, 326-335.
- Puškar, Krunoslav 2015: Esperanto (s)en perspektivo? *Croatian Esperantists on the International Auxiliary Language Esperanto*. *INDECS* 13(2): 322-341.
- Schubert, Klaus 1989: Interlinguistics – its aims, its achievements, and its place in language science. In: Klaus Schubert (ed.): *Interlinguistics: aspects of the science of planned languages*. Berlin – New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 7-44.
- Sherwood, Bruce Arne 1982: Variation in Esperanto. *Studies in the Linguistic Sciences* 12(1).
- Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove 1988: Multilingualism and the education of minority children. In: Tove Skutnabb-Kangas & Jim Cummins (eds.): *Minority Education: From Shame to Struggle*. Avon: Multilingual Matters, 9-44.
- Trubetzkoy, Nicolai Sergejevich 1976: Wie soll das Lautsystem einer künstlichen internationalen Hilfssprache beschaffen sein? In: Reinhard Haupenthal (ed.): *Plansprachen. Beiträge zur Interlinguistik*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 198-216.
- Wahl, Edgar von 1930: *Occidental – die Weltsprache*. Stuttgart: Franckh'sche Verlagshandlung.
- Zamenhof, L. L. 1905: *Fundamento de Esperanto*. Paris: Hachette et Cie.
- Zamenhof, L. L. 2000[1903]: *Esenco kaj estonteco de la lingvo internacia*. Tyresö: Inko.
- Zamenhof, L. L. 2001[1936]: *Lingvaj respondoj*. Tyresö: Inko.

## Web references

- [http://www.akademio-de-esperanto.org/decidoj/alfabeto\\_kaj\\_ortografio.html](http://www.akademio-de-esperanto.org/decidoj/alfabeto_kaj_ortografio.html).
- [http://www.akademio-de-esperanto.org/oficialaj\\_informoj/oficialaj\\_informoj\\_11\\_2009.html](http://www.akademio-de-esperanto.org/oficialaj_informoj/oficialaj_informoj_11_2009.html).
- [http://www.akademio-de-esperanto.org/decidoj/landnomoj/listo\\_de\\_rekomendataj\\_landnomoj/index.html](http://www.akademio-de-esperanto.org/decidoj/landnomoj/listo_de_rekomendataj_landnomoj/index.html).