Translating in Translation
Lecture for the Princeton Program in Translation
Princeton University
18 October 2010

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1. Planned languages

The International Language Esperanto is what is known as a planned language. Projects of planned languages have a long history. Hildegard of Bingen devised a kind of simplified Latin; Descartes, Newton, Leibnitz, and notably the first secretary of the Royal Society, Bishop John Wilkins, explored the possibility of rendering all knowledge and its interrelationships in linguistic terms; from the early nineteenth century on, dozens, indeed hundreds, of language projects based on existing languages have been proposed or developed, sometimes in minute detail. Such projects intended for practical use are paralleled by the phenomenon of invented languages – imagined, fictional languages, like the Utopian language of Thomas More, the linguistic nonsense-languages of Rabelais, or, in our day, Elvish and the other languages of Tolkien, or the language of Star Trek, Klingon.

We generally divide planned languages into two categories: a priori or philosophical languages, created ab ovo, with no lexical resemblance to existing languages, and a posteriori or auxiliary languages derived from the simplification of an existing language or from translingual combinations. Esperanto belongs in the latter category: it is an a posteriori translingual combination.

Umberto Eco, in a notable series of lectures published some fifteen years ago (Eco 1995), makes the claim that such efforts constitute manifestations of the human desire to perfect language. He begins his story with the Kabbala and with Dante and extends it through Ramon Lull, and on to Bacon, Komensky, and Wilkins. These ideas, Eco claims, derive from a yearning for the return of the prelapsarian, Adamic language, or the utopian desire for

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1 There are numerous histories of planned languages, among them Blanke 1985 (one of the most comprehensive) and Large 1985. See also Okrent 2009, who offers a particularly comprehensive analysis of Wilkins and a review of the Esperanto movement. For a comprehensive bibliography of planned languages, see Dulichenko 1990. Albani & Buonarrotti 1994 provide abundant details on both planned and imaginary languages.
2 On Klingon, see Okrent 2009.
3 On a priori, so-called “philosophical” languages see, for example, Knowlson 1975 and Stillman 1995.
human perfectibility in an ideal future. In this regard, they connect with one important aspect of poetic language extending through the western tradition, namely the desire of poets to transcend mere metaphor to arrive at the truth through linguistic means. There are two versions of the Fall in Genesis: the second describes the collapse of language – the force that brought the universe into existence (God spoke and it was so) and that Adam used to name the creatures. The Tower of Babel can be construed as that moment when signifier and signified parted company, when metaphor came into being, embellishment took the place of truth. Jehovah, the joker, can, in his omnipotence, compare himself only to himself: I am that I am, he declares, not I am like a great wind, or even I am vengeance, but I am what I am what I am. A rose is a rose is a rose, says Gertrude Stein. Metaphor is an incomplete descriptor. The seventeenth-century poet George Herbert, writing a sonnet on prayer, describes prayer through an extended series of metaphors: angels’ age, the soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage; but he ends with no metaphor at all: something understood. Becoming turns to being, movement becomes stasis, comparison becomes union. Such pursuit of linguistic perfection partakes of the mathematical (as Leibniz understood), but also of the poetic (as Herbert, and Sidney, and a host of other poets, attest). A planned language requires precision and poetry in equal parts.

The invention of a planned language may be seen either as a simple effort to find a linguistic bridge between languages or as an attempt to remedy linguistic inadequacy. Both are discernible in the origins and development of the International Language Esperanto. The first may be said to be the invention of a particular language, the second the reinvention of language itself.

2. The birth of Esperanto

Esperanto was the creation of Lazar Ludvik Zamenhof, born in 1859 in Bialystok, Poland, into a multilingual community the majority of whose members were, like Zamenhof himself, Jewish. At the time, Poland was part of the Russian Empire. A medical doctor, specializing in diseases of the eye, Zamenhof was interested in languages from his earliest years. His father, a teacher of German, was also for a while the Czarist censor for Hebrew and Yiddish in Warsaw. As a student in Moscow, Zamenhof became particularly interested in early forms of Zionism, but he turned away from this political solution to the so-called Jewish Question to pursue something broader. If Zionism could be seen as a response to,

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5 For a notable further example in Herbert, see particularly his poem “The Forerunners.”
6 Privat wrote the first, somewhat hagiographic, biography of Zamenhof (1920; translated 1931; sixth Esperanto edition 2007). Boulton 1960 and Korzhenkov 2010 are both available in English. The latter is abridged from Korjenkov 2009.
rather than a palliative of, anti-Semitism, Zamenhof’s interest in Esperanto was inspired at least in part by a desire to overcome anti-Semitism in a new world of tolerance and understanding. He published his first book, *Dr. Esperanto’s International Language* (as it was called in its later English edition), in 1887. In so doing, he aligned himself with linguistic reformers of many stripes: those who sought through poetry to push their languages to new heights, those who (like Eliezer Ben-Yehuda) sought to reform and expand languages for new uses, and, most radical of all, those who sought new heaven and new earth by starting language anew. We would mischaracterize Esperanto if we saw it as *only* linguistic radicalism: most of its earliest adepts saw it as simply a practical means of achieving international contact on the basis of equality. But there can be little doubt that Zamenhof’s project went beyond that: he understood that to mobilize people behind a new language he had to offer more than a mere auxiliary language of convenience to commerce and travel. And, particularly, by founding a literature as well as a language, he incorporated into the language the potential for the highest aspirations of human communication in an entirely new setting, not just the simplest linguistic transactions.7

But let us turn to specifics. The first version of Dr. Esperanto’s little book – pamphlet really – was in Russian, but further editions followed quickly in Polish, German, French and other languages.8 The contents were essentially the same:

1. an extended preface describing the principles of the new language,
2. a translation of the Lord’s Prayer,
3. an example of a letter in the International Language,
4. an original poem “Mia penso” (My Thought),
5. a translation of a poem by Heine,
6. a second original poem “Ho, mia kor’” (Oh, My Heart),
7. a request that the reader fill out a promise to learn the language if ten million other people do the same,
8. a description of the alphabet and grammar, and
9. (on an accompanying fold-out sheet) a thousand-word vocabulary.

In the preface, Zamenhof identified the three principal problems that he faced in creating his language. They may seem simple enough, but they tell us much: first, making the language easy to learn (“to render the study of the language so easy as to make its acquisition mere play to the learner”); second, making it easy to use internationally; and, third, overcoming the natural reluctance to learn a language spoken by very few people.

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7 Zamenhof’s idealism is evident in the handful of original poems that he composed. See Tonkin 2002b.
8 Facsimiles of the First Book in Russian, Polish, French, German, English, and Swedish can be found in Ludovikito 1991a.
We can rephrase these three issues as the game of Esperanto, the globalizing of Esperanto, and the creation of an Esperanto community.

Over a century later, we can say that Zamenhof was quite successful with the first (the game of Esperanto): most people learn the language outside formal instruction, these days particularly on the internet. Globalization was a more difficult problem, because the language had to have roots somewhere: Esperanto began as a European language and, despite its revolutionary approach to grammar and word formation, retained much of its Europeanness, not least because of the origin of its speakers. As for the third problem: alone among planned language projectors (but in this respect in harmony with Ben-Yehuda and his project for Modern Hebrew), Zamenhof understood that it was as important to create a community of speakers as it was to create the structure of a language: one without the other was useless. His first book bore the epigraph “In order for a language to be international, it is not enough to name it so” (por ke lingvo estu internacia, ne sufiĉas nomi ĝin tia).

It is significant that Zamenhof chose in his first book to stress both the practical side of his new language (a specimen letter) and the literary side (original and translated poems). The birth of Esperanto cannot be understood without an awareness of these two co-equal aspects. Zamenhof's language was no mere code, but an artistic achievement. He is often called the creator of Esperanto, and the language itself is sometimes described as a verko, a work. Zamenhof rightly understood that there is more to language than efficiency: a language must be capable of transcending itself, of accommodating itself not only to the mechanics of communication but also to artistic expression. Thus he stressed literary composition and translation from the outset.

The vocabulary sheet attached to his first book is in two languages: Esperanto, and the language of the edition in question. It raises a set of interrelated questions of considerable complexity. One such question is utterly fundamental: How do words mean in Esperanto? Related to it is a second question: How can the complexity of meaning that we find in, say, English, be conveyed in a made-up language? It is this second question, particularly, that confounds the uninitiated. A third question arises from the second: in what sense can Esperanto be described as made-up?

This last question merits a further brief diversion on the subject of metaphor. When we speak of “natural” language as opposed to “artificial” language, we are speaking

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9 www.lernu.net has 90,000 members.
10 This is not entirely a typological issue, but rather an issue of perception and presentation. On the typological issue, however, see, particularly, Parkvall 2010, Jansen 2010.
11 But see Harshav 1993:84-85, who stresses that the social emergence of Hebrew was very much a collective effort.
metaphorically. Indeed, the field of linguistics is riddled with metaphor. There is in reality no such thing as a natural language: languages are made by people and spoken by people. The process of language standardization that we attribute to a Dante or a Luther is a process either of deliberate planning or of elite consensus, depending on how we wish to interpret it. But natural it is not. Nor can a language be described as a “living” language or a “dead” language in any but a metaphorical sense: it is its speakers who are living or dead, not the language.\textsuperscript{12} Thus, as we approach Esperanto we must try to put aside certain linguistic prejudices and preconceptions and evaluate the language as we find it, not in terms of preconceived categories. One of these preconceptions is the notion of artificiality. All languages are artificial. Most languages do not spring fully armed from the head of a single person, and to this extent the origins of Esperanto are different from the origins of other languages – but this is primarily a matter of origins, not a description of what happens to a language once it is turned over to a community.\textsuperscript{13}

3. The meaning of words in Esperanto

To return to the first question, how do words mean in Esperanto? We can answer this best by looking at the vocabulary that accompanied the First Book. Here is a brief excerpt from the vocabulary in the English version:

\begin{itemize}
\item botel’ bottle
\item bov’an ox
\item branĉ’ a branch
\item brand’ brandy
\item bril’ to shine, to sparkle, to glitter
\item bros’ a brush
\item bru’ to make a noise, to bawl
\item brul’ to burn one’s self
\item brust’ the breast, bosom
\item brut’ brute
\item buŝ’ the mouth
\item buter’ butter
\item buton’ a button
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{12} In this sense even the term “language death,” widely used today, can easily mislead. In fact it describes either the extinction of a population or a change (voluntary or coerced) in the language behavior of that population.

\textsuperscript{13} The lexis, for example, develops in Esperanto much as it does in other languages – through usage. While there exists an Esperanto Academy, its main function is to ratify word-roots already in use, and to offer advice on the general direction of the language.
A cursory glance at this vocabulary reveals that it is drawn primarily from Romance languages (botel', branĉ', bril', bros', bru', brul', brut', buŝ', buton'), with an admixture of Germanic languages (brand', brust', buter'). A different excerpt might have revealed a smattering of words of Slavic origin. A different excerpt might have revealed a smattering of words of Slavic origin. Many of the lexical elements in our excerpt, from both Germanic and Romance languages, also appear in English. Several (bov', for example) seem to come straight from Latin. One school of thought sees Esperanto as essentially a modernization of Latin. In his youth, Zamenhof was particularly attracted to Yiddish, regarded as a low-prestige language yet highly useful as an interlanguage and a language of the home across central and eastern Europe (Zamenhof even compiled a grammar of Yiddish). He may have seen Latin as a kind of high-prestige Yiddish, and Esperanto accordingly as a simplification of Latin, a high-prestige interlanguage much as Yiddish could be construed as a low-prestige interlanguage.

(We might also note in passing that the alphabet of Esperanto includes diacritics: there are 28 letters in the alphabet, each corresponding to one sound.)

My quotation of vocabulary, drawn from R. H. Geoghegan’s English edition of Zamenhof’s first book (1889), offers in its translation of the Esperanto lexical elements on the left, a series of words adapted as needed to indicate their part of speech. Thus bril’ is defined as an infinitive (“to shine, to sparkle, to glitter”), buŝ’ as a noun (“the mouth,” to distinguish it from the verb “to mouth”). But the lexical elements on the left – the Esperanto items – are for the most part without grammatical category: they are roots from which words can be formed. Thus they are elements in words, not words themselves. Accordingly, there is a certain disconnect between the Esperanto on the left and the other language on the right. Zamenhof affixed endings to the roots denote grammatical categories. The English definitions assume that a particular ending has been affixed to each root, though in fact it has not been. Thus “to shine, to sparkle, to glitter” is in Esperanto not “bril’” but “brili” (the ending <i> denotes the infinitive), and “the mouth” in Esperanto is “la buŝo” (the ending <o> denotes a noun).

The explanation of this disconnect lies in Zamenhof’s system. Here is how he explains it:

15 The first attempt at an English version of the First Book was so poorly translated that Zamenhof withdrew it (Holzhaus 1969:239-241). Geoghegan then provided a new translation. Of the first translation, by Julius Steinhaus, Geoghegan wrote in a letter to H. A. Epton, administrator of the British Esperanto Association, that “the enthusiasm of Mr. Steinhaus for the great cause [of Esperanto] was far more profound than his possession of the English language” (Ludovikito 1991a:470). Both texts are reproduced in Ludovikito 1991a. In the same year, 1889, as Geoghegan’s translation was published in Warsaw, Henry Phillips, Jr., of the American Philosophical Society produced his own translation, published as An Attempt Towards an International Language by Dr. Esperanto (New York: Henry Holt). Ludovikito 1991b reproduces the text.
I arranged for the full dismemberment of ideas into free-standing words, so that the whole language, instead of words in various grammatical forms, consists only of invariant words.... And the various grammatical forms, reciprocal relations between words, etc., are expressed through the combination of invariant words. But because such construction of a language is entirely foreign for the peoples of Europe and adjusting to it would be a difficult matter for them, I have accommodated this dismemberment of the language to the spirit of the languages of Europe, so that, if someone learns my language by the textbook, not having already read the preface ... he will not even suppose that the structure of this language differs in any way from the structure of his own language.\textsuperscript{16}

I have quoted this passage at length because it reveals a very important element in the nature of Esperanto itself, a language made up of roots plus endings.\textsuperscript{17} The arrangement makes for great flexibility among parts of speech. “Brili” may mean “to shine,” but “brila” (with the adjectival ending <a>) means “brilliant,” “brile” (with the adverbial ending <e>) means “brilliantly,” and “brilo” means brilliancy. Esperanto is a highly productive language: out of its basic vocabulary an abundance of words can be created, not only through the use of endings denoting grammatical categories, but also through affixes and compounding. Thus the individual lemma may cover an abundance of meaning.

Apart from certain invariant roots, which are at the same time words (primarily conjunctions, interjections, prepositions), there is an inherent problem in describing the precise meaning of Esperanto roots in a bilingual dictionary because the roots manifest themselves as words only when they are combined with other elements. Limits on the number of such combinations are determined not so much by convention (as is the case with Latinate elements in English or French) as by sense: if a word newly compounded makes sense, it is, under normal circumstances, legitimate.

\textsuperscript{16} My (somewhat literal) translation. Geoghegan’s rendering of the passage perhaps indicates that even he did not fully realize the revolutionary nature of Zamenhof’s conception. Geoghegan uses more conventional linguistic terminology, but in the process introduces the word “syllable” where Zamenhof had used the word “word.” Since silab’ does not turn up in Zamenhof’s thousand-word vocabulary (Vilborg records it as first coined by Zamenhof in 1889), we cannot be entirely certain that Zamenhof’s use of vort’ did not at the same time cover the term “syllable,” though that seems unlikely. Here is Geoghegan’s translation: “I introduced a complete dismemberment of ideas into independent words, so that the whole language consists, not of words in different states of grammatical inflexion, but of unchangeable words.... The various grammatical inflexions, the reciprocal relations of the members of a sentence, are expressed by the junction of immutable syllables. But the structure of such a synthetic language being altogether foreign to the chief European nations, and consequently difficult for them to become accustomed to, I have adapted this principle of dismemberment to the spirit of the European languages, in such a manner that anyone learning my tongue from grammar alone ... will never perceive that the language differs in any respect from that of his mother-tongue.” Phillips, however, sticks with Zamenhof’s use of “word” rather than “syllable” (Ludovikito 1991b:102). Making a similar point in Tonkin 2010, I erroneously print Geoghegan’s translation instead of mine, thereby obscuring my own argument.

\textsuperscript{17} On the implications of the passage, see Schubert 2010.
The juxtaposition of roots in Esperanto and words in the other language does, however, suggest that in their conception the roots carry a certain grammatical freight. Zamenhof perhaps thought of *bril’* as verbal, *bros’* as substantival. The question of the grammatical status of roots has resulted in lively discussion over the years among experts in Esperanto, some arguing that the roots are intended to have no grammatical denomination, others pointing out that in Zamenhof himself treated the roots differently. Thus, while *bros’* as a substantival root permits the coinage of *brosi*, to brush, *balai*, to sweep, requires that a broom become, not *balao* (the act of sweeping) but *balailo* (an instrument for sweeping).

But the problem goes deeper. Zamenhof’s vocabulary list does not offer definitions (it would be hard to do so at this early stage and with so small a vocabulary), but translations: “bov’” means (more or less) “ox” (though if you add an <a> rather than the implied <o> of the noun, it means “bovine”). In other words, while Zamenhof makes clear lexical choices (*botelo* not *fla*šo for “bottle”; *bovo* not *okso* for “ox”), he remains remarkably unworried about semantics: in essence, the semantics of early Esperanto are the semantics of what Benjamin Lee Whorf was to describe as Standard Average European. I might add that, even as late as the publication of Zamenhof’s *Fundamento de Esperanto* (1905), he continues this practice of juxtaposing Esperanto roots and ethnic-language words.

4. Problem or advantage?

This double problem – first, the fundamental incomparability of Esperanto roots with complete words (however we define the notion of a word – another fraught problem in more or less all languages, and made no easier in Esperanto by Zamenhof’s clarification that I have just quoted), and, second, the instability of semantic value in early Esperanto – none the less carries with it some distinct advantages. My colleague Timothy Reagan, in a recent conversation, ascribed to Zamenhof “uncanny good luck” in creating the language the way he did. On the first problem (the incomparability of roots and words), Zamenhof’s definition of “words” in Esperanto is distinctly original for someone whose knowledge of languages is limited to European languages plus Hebrew: though they are relatively seldom used in this way, the endings such as <o> or <a> have the status of independent words – as do affixes like “-estro,” “head of,” as in “fakestro,” head of a department, or “ado,” continuing action, or “ejo,” “place.” Thus “fakestro,” despite its representation on the page as though it is a single word, is in fact a combination of three words in the Zamenhofian sense: *fak + estr + o*. This analytic approach to language is reminiscent of the

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18 See, for example, Kalocsay 1938, Szerdahelyi 1976. Some argue, with considerable justification, that the semantic value of the root is the determining factor: the roots are not so much grammatically marked as semantically determined.

19 On Zamenhof’s knowledge of languages, see Holzhaus 1969:19-204.
structuralism soon to emerge in the work of Saussure and others. When combined with the fact that Zamenhof provided for an accusative case in Esperanto, thus freeing up word order, the analytic approach creates remarkable flexibility.

On the second problem (semantic instability), the initial (European) speakers of Esperanto were obliged, to a greater or lesser degree, to look to their own languages for the semantic grounding of the Esperanto words they used. While the result could on occasion be confusion or misunderstanding, for the most part it delivered what is an essential element in a planned language: a history. It is a truism that all words mean only to the extent that they already have meaning; meaning is a regressive phenomenon. That is why languages emerge out of a progressive process of language change. While Zamenhof created a new grammar, and assigned fixed lexemes to particular concepts, he retained and indeed incorporated into the language a sense of linguistic history: it is an open question whether Zamenhof created a language or reshaped a group of existing languages – whether, in other words, he was closer to Bishop Wilkins or to Ben-Yehuda.20

To the extent that Zamenhof’s word-roots were derived from a common European semantics, he enabled translation out of existing languages and into his new language: his vocabulary mapped on to pre-existing languages. In this sense, we might describe the translation process as essential intralingual in the sense in which Jakobson (1959) uses that term: one set of words is substituted for another set of words, Standard Average European is relexified.

This premeditated imprecision opened up the possibility of translating into Esperanto the major literary works of other languages. Zamenhof himself embarked on a massive program of literary translation – from Shakespeare, Gogol, Goethe, Schiller, Molière, and the entire Old Testament.21 As he himself pointed out on more than one occasion, a language becomes a language only in its use – and translation confronts the translator with situations not easily replicated in a fledgling language community: things happen in Shakespeare or Goethe that have never happened in Esperanto. It is also no accident that

20 Zamenhof’s father, Marcus Zamenhof, was particularly interested in proverbs. He compiled a collection in four languages: Russian, Polish, French and German. He began publishing them in 1905 in a series of fascicles. Two fascicles, with the four languages arranged in parallel texts, appeared. A third fascicle contained Esperanto equivalents, probably supplied by his son, though published under Marcus’s name. A further collection, adding Hebrew and Latin, was published by his son in 1910 after Marcus’s death. The introduction supplied by Waringhien to a new edition of the Esperanto proverbs (Zamenhof 1961) remarks on Zamenhof’s skill: “There is nothing easy about imitating by art the products of the popular brain, or giving to sentences in an entirely new language the patina of centuries. Zamenhof needed all his linguistic intuition, his poetic feeling, to succeed. And he was amazingly successful” (p. xiii; my translation). See also Waringhien’s essay “Kelkio pri frazeologio” in Waringhien 1983:103-119. Many of these proverbs have since become embedded in the language. Here too was an attempt to create a past for Esperanto, a rootedness in the common European popular tradition. Zamenhof also exhibited a strong interest in popular fables, translating, over an extended period, 107 of the 156 fables of Hans Andersen.
Zamenhof focused his translating energies on drama: drama forces the translator to find ways of reproducing spoken language, in this case in a language that has heretofore been primarily a written language. Thus translation becomes a motor for linguistic development and expansion (Tonkin 2002a).

It is, of course, more than relexification: through the creation of an ever-expanding context, Esperanto expressions gradually take on their own distinctive semantic valency. And through the relocation of these semantic elements in a new grammar and syntax the grammar and syntax evolve as well, in a diachronic process of what Givón (1979) calls syntacticization. One of the earliest adepts of Esperanto, Antoni Grabowski, translator of *Pan Tadeusz* into the language, and the greatest of the early translators, found in the structure of Esperanto new forms of expression that even its creator had not discovered, or at least had not used. Grabowski expanded the structural flexibility of the language. He was followed by many literary experimenters, notably the young enthusiast Eugen Mihalski, whose poetic career was cut short by Stalin’s purges (Lins 1988), but whose daring exploitation of the structural potential of Esperanto can be said to have had its effect not only on poetry but also on the spoken language (see Appendix). This process continues in our own day: Karol Pič has pushed the language in new directions in his novels; Edwin de Kock has done the same with poetry. Others, moving in the opposite direction, have made of Esperanto a kind of expanded Romance language, notably Fernando de Diego, for example in his translations of Cervantes and Gabriel García Marquez, with their abundant Latinate neologisms.

It is perhaps important to add that the process of translation is seldom that of word-substitution, nor is it even that of word-substitution plus syntactic accommodation. André Lefevere (1999) has given us the useful concept of “grids” – textual and conceptual markers that the translator recognizes as the organizing points of the translation. So there is a third level of translation, beyond lexis and syntax. We might call it the cultural level. Here the challenges for the early translator of Esperanto, and even for the translator today, were and are considerable. Esperanto speakers argue endlessly over whether Esperanto “has its own culture” or is merely a mediator between cultures. In truth, such mediation is not possible if the markers to which Lefevere refers cannot be located in an Esperanto text. Such markers emerge over time and with constant and intensive usage. It is not enough for the translator to construct an elegant Esperanto text: that text must mean with all the intensity of its original. This also implies that a sense of genre (literary and social) must emerge. Esperanto, as Auld has pointed out on occasion, has an advantage over many other languages: its translators tend to be native speakers of the source language. But for that advantage to play out, competence in Esperanto is crucially important: the good translator

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22 On the work of these and other original writers in Esperanto see Sutton 2008.
is likely to be not only a good speaker but also someone immersed in the give-and-take of the Esperanto community and that community's collective sense of self.

5. A language of translation

Thus we can describe Esperanto as a language of translation – not only a language which, in its early days, was in part shaped through translation (as indeed have many languages been so shaped), but also a language in which the very semantic units were translated concepts. As we have discovered from his First Book, Zamenhof was at pains to make the foreign familiar: learning Esperanto was to be a game, and its words were to look as familiar as possible to its first speakers. But in truth Esperanto was a common ground in which all speakers and all texts were equally foreign, equally Other than the originals from which they were drawn. Esperanto was not only a way of transcending the particularities of ethnic languages but also a place fundamentally different, idealistically and linguistically, from its sources. Its early adherents, linked by a particular kind of idealism, found in it a social refuge, but it was also a linguistic refuge.

Michel Foucault speaks of one form of translation as “derailing” the source language. Derrida describes it as “destroying” the source language and replacing it with the target language. It is not so much in translation that one finds literary expression in Esperanto derailing or destroying its original as in original literature itself, which seems in some sense to defy our very notion of what constitutes literary expression by reminding us of its difference from the native languages that we carry with us. In some sense, Esperanto is always bilingual, and always at the border between languages and language. “He words me, girls,” says Cleopatra of Octavius (Antony and Cleopatra 5.2.190). In Esperanto one not only speaks a language (lingvo), one also “languages” (lingvas). To speak Esperanto is both to do something similar to all other languages (Esperanto is, in most respect, a language like any other), and also to do something fundamentally different (Esperanto negates the particularities of language and moves the speaker and user into a new creative space). It is an easily possessed alternative culture, but also a space in which the freedom to “word” prevails. We might go further and say, not that Zamenhof turned his language over to its users, but that he empowered his speakers to continue the construction of the language that he had begun. The translator into Esperanto constructs the text into which he or she translates – to a degree markedly greater than in translation between ethnic languages.

The search for the perfect language described by Umberto Eco intersects with the work of the translator at least in so far as translation is itself a search for meaning – for meaning in the source language (capturing the essence of the text to be translated) and its accurate transferral to the target language. This meaning, Walter Benjamin suggests, resides in
“pure language,” *reine* Sprache, a phenomenon that underlies the individualized text: “A translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language” (Benjamin 1968:78). This language, says Benjamin, is “imprisoned” in the original text and must be released, and thus “the great motif of integrating many tongues into one true language is at work” (1968:77). Whether Benjamin offers a defensible explanation of the work of the translator need not concern us: his theory reflects a common mythology – that of the perfect utterance existing somewhere beyond the particularities of individual languages. Benjamin might have been writing of the aspect of Esperanto that I have just been addressing.

It requires little extension of Benjamin’s essentially mystical idea to point out that the process of creating a language resembles the pursuit of meaning that engages the translator. Zamenhof’s linguistic creation (which, as we have noted, is often called in Esperanto a *verko*, a *creative work*) can be readily construed as the pursuit of the pure language to which Benjamin refers. Zamenhof’s handful of original poems, particularly *La Espero*, confirm that such an idea was not far from his mind (Tonkin 2002b). Regardless of whether our position is essentially mystical (perhaps “linguistically theological”) or merely practical, what this implies is that translation into Esperanto is, or at least was, back in the early days, in an important sense translation into a translation.

But Esperanto now has over 120 years of continuous use behind it – years in which it has been applied to almost every conceivable circumstance, and exposed to all manner of influences. In the process, Esperanto vocabulary has developed its own semantic value, and modern Esperanto dictionaries, large and small, reflect this fact. While a majority of Esperanto speakers are speakers of European languages, a large number are not; and there is also a considerable number of such speakers who use the language with a fluency comparable to that displayed in their native languages.

However, the *fact* of those native languages is always present: all speakers of Esperanto (even its relatively rare native speakers) are bilingual; all, to a greater or lesser extent, are at home in other linguistic environments. Even among the most fluent of speakers, the influence of other languages is always potentially present. A simple example will serve: in the poetry of Edmond Privat, writing in Switzerland in the early nineteenth century, one discerns the strong influence of Keats, and in the contemporary Icelandic poet Baldur

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23 It is this myth that Shakespeare invokes in several of his sonnets, for example 18 (“Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?”) and 55 (“Not marble, nor the gilded monuments”)
Ragnarsson the influence of Milton and other poets British and American. Both were students of English literature: writing in Esperanto, they imitate the foreign. 24

By the same token, Esperanto is, for almost all of its speakers, a kind of ancillary linguistic environment, a holiday language, collectively complete perhaps, but often individually incomplete. 25 One might expect such variety of linguistic influence to impede communication, but for the most part it does not. Esperanto is intended for international communication, for communication across languages, and its speakers have a vested interest in finding common ground. This desire for linguistic community keeps the divisive influence of other languages in check and results in a certain linguistic conservatism and a surprisingly high degree of semantic consensus26 – but at the same time the influence of other languages feeds and enriches Esperanto, giving it a productive variety out of proportion to its relatively limited number of speakers. Antoine Berman, in an influential essay (2000:287), suggests that literary prose “intermingles the polylingual space of a community.” In Esperanto, Berman’s essentially metaphorical remark applies literally – and not only to prose but to poetry as well: the linguistic medium of Esperanto brings many languages together.

6. Zamenhof’s luck

Whether Zamenhof was driven by “uncanny good luck” or simply linguistic canniness is open to question. Although we have large quantities of Zamenhof’s correspondence, and know, or have discovered in recent years, a great deal about his life, our knowledge is distinctly lacking in the personal. We know little about what he read, little about what he admired in his reading, little about his study of languages and linguistics, little about how he spent the day, little about his friends. Many people describe his personality in passing, but none of his contemporaries, not even his first biographer Edmond Privat, give us much to go on. In many respects, as Korzhenkov has recently pointed out (Korženkov 2009), he was a wild-eyed idealist, filled with impractical optimism. For him, Esperanto was primarily a means to an end, a fact which shocked and dismayed many of his more conventional followers (Schor 2010). But this very fact also assisted him: eager to create a community of like-minded people, he essentially ceded control over Esperanto to its early

24 See my essay on Ragnarsson’s poetry, Tonkin 2007. I mention Hopkins, Stevens, and Eliot. This is not, of course, to suggest that there are not also influences from these poets’ own languages, only that these “foreign” models seem particularly evident.

25 Knowledge of the language varies among its speakers. The fact that it is relatively easy to construct utterances in Esperanto means that many speakers do not advance to full fluency, but make do with a level of proficiency that serves their immediate needs.

26 The old canard that Esperanto would “break up into dialects” is simply incorrect. There is no evidence to support it.
community of speakers. Needing the speakers, he used the only bargaining-chip that he had – the language itself. There are plenty of instances in which he attempts to pull back, attempts to regain control over a fractious and disorganized community, particularly when in the early days people propose reforms to the language and he seeks to navigate a way between preserving the language and adapting it to its users. But in essence Zamenhof (as we have noted), unique among the creators of planned languages, realized that a language was not a collection of rules in a book, but the behavior of a community of practice, and that the language could stabilize and grow only through linguistic exchange.27

We also know little about Zamenhof’s connection with the scholarly currents in linguistics in his day, if in fact he had any. The noted Polish linguist Jan Baudouin de Courtenay (1845-1929), champion of synchronic linguistics and precursor of structuralism, was developing his linguistic theories at the Universities of Kazan and Tartu at the time when Esperanto was coming into being (Baudouin de Courtenay became the founding president of the Polish Esperanto Association; and René de Saussure, one of Ferdinand’s younger brothers, was a prominent Esperantist). Baudouin de Courtenay was among the first linguists to articulate the difference between language (an abstract structure) and speech (the rule-bound but individualized behavior of the particular speaker). As we have seen, Zamenhof’s keen awareness of this distinction, and his emphasis on building a speech community as well as constructing a language, was one of the principal reasons why his language, almost unique among planned languages, developed a significant following,28 leading in turn to the establishment of a functionally autonomous language community. At the same time, his structuralist approach to the language allowed non-Europeans to find familiar elements in it, so that, quite early on, Esperanto broke out of the semantic and lexical cocoon of its European origins to embrace other parts of the world – this despite its rootedness in the semantics of European languages. Indeed, one of its principal areas of growth after 1900 was China and Japan (Lins 2008).

7. The tradition of translation

A hundred and twenty years later, the translator into Esperanto still experiences the remarkable freedom afforded Esperanto by its system of word formation and its grammatical flexibility. All linguistic utterance is in part word-play, but in Esperanto the ability to play with words, to present them in new and original ways or in structures of elaborate complexity, is one of the principal pleasures. Okrent, writing recently (2009),

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27 On Zamenhof’s role in this process, see Schubert 2010.
28 The only other language to come close to it was Volapük in the 1880s. It seems likely that many of Volapük’s disillusioned followers made their way to Esperanto.
points out that one of the most engaging aspects of the Esperanto speech community is its humor, much of it language-based (see Melnikov 2008).

Of course, the language is no longer confined to the thousand or so roots that Zamenhof started out with. While Zamenhof himself expanded those roots (see Nomura 1987), most words in Esperanto were coined not by Zamenhof but by others, in the course of 120 years of linguistic development. Esperanto is not without its idiomatic expressions, its phraseological uniquenesses, but for the most part it offers a freedom not enjoyed by most other languages. And if the effects of time and usage threaten to calcify common expression little by little, the language is expanding, and discovering latent possibilities in its structure, at a rate that would seem to more than balance this constriction of usage.

Apart from a short work by Dickens, Zamenhof began his translation into Esperanto with what might be described as the Everest of literary translation: Hamlet. I have written elsewhere about the reasons for this choice (Hamlet was published just seven short years after the language itself). I mention it now as a reminder that Shakespeare in Esperanto is almost as old as Esperanto itself. Zamenhof chose for his translation a form of accentual verse derived both from the original English and from his superior knowledge of German, thus signaling the accentual rather than the quantitative nature of Esperanto verse and aligning it with the Germanic languages (a decision in fact already made in his brief translation of Heine’s Mir träumte von einem Königskind in the First Book; for a different and unsuccessful approach, see Brendon Clark 1957).

From Zamenhof’s day to our own, thousands of volumes of translated literature have appeared in Esperanto, from a wide range of literatures of the west and east. Hamlet has been translated twice (see Newell 1964 for the second), Dante, Goethe and others several times over. Translations include numerous works from outside the European languages, particularly from Chinese and Japanese. Equally abundant has been original work (see Sutton 2008; Pleadin 2006), especially poetry (Tonkin 1993), and, in recent years, the novel (drama has been less evident: in a diasporic community, assembling audiences is not easy). Esperanto is firmly established as a literary language. Indeed, one of its principal

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31 After Zamenhof and Grabowski, it was particularly the Hungarian poet and critic Kálmán Kalocsay who established the poetic norms in Esperanto. As editor of the literary journal Literatura Mondo, Kalocsay was deeply immersed in the Esperanto movement and knew the literature intimately. See particularly his Parnasa Gvidlibro (1932; Kalocsay, Waringhien & Bernard 1968).
32 Newell’s translation suffers from the problem mentioned above: it is insufficiently anchored in the everyday use of the language. In truth, Newell’s aim is different: not so much to produce an actable text as to follow the original as closely as possible. The resulting translation may be of interest to the student of Shakespeare, but not to the actor.
33 See Paul Gubbins’s survey of the current situation: Gubbins 2010.
functions over the years has been the transfer and circulation of texts and cultural materials across linguistic boundaries.

8. Translating Shakespeare

When I came to translate Shakespeare, I did so with, behind me, the rather reassuring yet daunting weight of seventeen or so earlier translations of Shakespeare’s plays, among them King Lear, Othello, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, The Comedy of Errors, Richard III, As You Like It, Twelfth Night, and The Tempest (see Boulton 1987). Among the translators were the two greatest original poets in the language, who were also two of its greatest translators – the Hungarian Kálmán Kalocsay and the Scotsman William Auld. I should add that I myself do not write original poetry in Esperanto. I chose plays that had hitherto not been translated: first Henry V and then The Winter’s Tale (Tonkin 2003, 2006).

I have written elsewhere about the intricacies of Esperanto translation, suggesting that, in my own experience, Winnie-the-Pooh may be an even greater challenge than Henry V (Tonkin 2010), in part because of the cultural and social specificity of its fiction and in part because of its abundance of word-play. Separated from us by a relatively short span of time, it none the less describes a world whose assumptions no longer obtain.

The challenge of Shakespeare is different, but not entirely so. The Shakespearean style is elevated, and the rhetoric of the Esperanto translation should reflect that, but the nature of that elevation is in many respects contested in the recent history of production. It is difficult to translate Shakespeare without taking into consideration that Shakespeare is a moving target: he has become an industry, a commodity. To what extent should the translator seek a degree of archaism? To what extent should the translator push language to its limits in translating Shakespeare? To what extent should the translator mediate, not only between English and the target language, but between Shakespeare the Elizabethan playwright and the modern audience for Shakespeare? Pondering these questions, I started from a simple principle: we own the Shakespeare of today and the voice in which he is rendered should be our voice. So I eschewed archaisms (they are possible in Esperanto: style has changed over 120 years, and also writers have sought to create stylistic devices for expressing the archaic), and avoided neologisms and near-neologisms – recent coinages of limited circulation: I made no words up; everything could be readily located in a

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34 Auld (1987) had translated the St. Crispin’s Day speech from Henry V, but I decided specifically to ignore his translation (which I had none the less read and studied earlier) when I came to do mine, since I felt it would be more distracting than helpful. The two translations make an interesting comparison, though I am struck by how similar Auld’s strategy and mine turn out to be.
comprehensive Esperanto dictionary. A related problem is that of proper names. Should one render them in Esperanto or preserve the original spelling and pronunciation? The zeal of many Esperanto speakers to render names in Esperanto garb can be confusing and distracting, and sticking with the original may serve to exoticize and foreignize the text to a degree. I sought a medium between these two extremes.

Iambic pentameter works well in Esperanto – except for the fact that, since the accent falls always on the second-to-last syllable, one must add an unaccented syllable at the end of the line or use elision. Elision, if used excessively, can be distracting, and also tends to do violence to the flow of the language. More problematic is the conciseness of English – its use of monosyllables, as contrasted with the disyllabic or multisyllabic nature of Esperanto. One is faced with two options: extend the number of lines, or reduce the compression of ideas. I decided early on that I would stick to the same number of lines as the original. If I had to sacrifice a particular image or an element in a sentence, I did so. Of course I was not alone in so doing: even translators into languages closely related to English, like German, are forced to do the same. Faced with such a decision, I tried to take into consideration the maintenance of image-patterns and the rhetorical coherence of the original text. (As for that original text, I chose not to attempt my own construction, but simply to follow the text of the Arden edition.)

Two linguistic features of *Henry V* required particular attention: the non-native English speaker Fluellen, whose efforts to speak sophisticated English often founder on the rocks of complexity, and the presence of the French language in the scene in which the Princess of France attempts to learn English. Rendering dialect and non-standard speech in Esperanto (in fact accurately rendering register in general) is a particular problem, best overcome by seeking analogous locutions in Esperanto, but not necessarily the same ones as in the original (Fluellen’s Welsh speech in Shakespeare’s original seems idiosyncratic in the extreme, and essentially a stereotyped representation of a stage Welshman).

Shakespeare’s French nobles speak English – a common convention that eliminates linguistic difference in the interests of audience comprehension. But this is not so in the memorable scene in which Princess Katherine attempts to learn English, ending the experience in shock at the sheer vulgarity of the English language. The scene depends on translingual puns, in which innocent English words, mangled by their French speakers, turn into homonyms of French obscenities. Shakespeare needs a second language in this scene, since he can hardly depict an English lesson in which the pupil speaks fluent English, and thus he writes the scene in French. I was able to render the scene in Esperanto, exploiting differences between Esperanto and English. Since Esperanto has developed over the years a rich vocabulary of obscene language (much of it created by Kálmán Kalocsay and his collaborators, but rapidly absorbed, especially by young people, into everyday
Esperanto), it was not difficult to turn innocent English into punning Esperanto vulgarities.\(^{35}\)

In turning to *The Winter’s Tale*, I moved from a play written in the middle of Shakespeare’s career to one written at the end, and from a history play to what is in essence a pastoral romance. The latter produced some new problems (the rendering of lyrics, for example), but the former required immediate attention. Over the decade separating these two plays, Shakespeare’s versification had moved on – to a much looser style, with numerous mid-line breaks and far fewer end-stopped lines. I decided to do my best to reflect that shift in style between *Henry V* and *The Winter’s Tale*.

The result of this exercise is there for the reader (and, perhaps one day, the performer) to judge (see, for example, Ragnarsson 2010). Ultimately, translations are only as good as their readership judges them to be, and as they influence the forward movement of the language.

9. Planned language and language planning

In a couple of recent articles I have described my experience with Esperanto translations and with the language in general (Tonkin 2009, 2010). One subject on which I have not touched here is translation out of Esperanto. Since Esperanto is a language in which phraseologies and idiomatic expressions are scarcer than in English, finding the right tone and the right turn of phrase in English can be particularly difficult. Translating Esperanto poetry is especially hard, and I have seldom seen adequate renderings of Esperanto poems in English (though moving in the other direction is a lot easier). One reason for this difficulty is surely the fact that the poet is attracted to Esperanto by precisely what cannot be readily expressed in his or her own language. In translating Tivadar Soros out of Esperanto and into English a few years ago (Tonkin 2000), I encountered the particular difficulty that arises when the writer is a less-than-competent user of Esperanto, so that his Esperanto text is in many respects a quasi-translation from a non-existent Hungarian original. Does one seek to capture such linguistic ghosts, or translate what one assumes he

\(^{35}\) As I remark elsewhere (Tonkin 2010:183), “Although the rank chauvinism (if that is what it is) of much of this play might seem to make it unsuitable for translation into Esperanto, of all Shakespeare’s plays it is one of the most sensitive to the nuances of language difference. Indeed the scene with Katherine that I have just described comes immediately after Henry’s speech at the siege of Harfleur, whose principal subject is the horrors of rape by uncontrollable soldiers. The nonetheless hilarious and bawdy scene that follows is therefore also, and more troublingly, a depiction of a kind of linguistic rape of the Princess Katherine, who is later to become one of the spoils of war. Thus, by humor, Shakespeare entraps us morally.”
is trying to say? I was playfully accused of writing better than my original, an accusation of which I was not entirely innocent.

But that is a topic for another time. Let me end by setting my subject in a different framework, the one from which I began – planned language. Following Einar Haugen (1959), specialists in the study of language planning generally divide their field into two major categories: corpus planning (the planning of a language’s linguistic corpus), and status planning (the planning of the language’s status, for example as a language of government or a preferred language in particular contexts). To this distinction, Cooper (1989) added acquisition planning (the planning of the teaching and learning of a language), and Haarmann (1990) added prestige planning, the elevation of the planning process itself such that it acquires the approval of the public. Most planned languages never move beyond the first (corpus planning): they are inert projects rather than languages actually spoken and used. While obviously acutely interested in corpus planning, Zamenhof went beyond it to consider status planning: he worked as hard or harder to build a community of speakers as he had worked to create his language in the first place. As we have seen, no other planner of an international language did anything similar.

But the other two forms of planning are evident in Esperanto too. From the beginning Zamenhof was interested in acquisition planning: making his language easy to learn, a kind of game. And as a second language acquired by native speakers of other languages, Esperanto requires a comprehensive strategy for its acquisition (reflected today in such popular websites as lernu.net and edukado.net). Finally, the decision to translate Hamlet into Esperanto, so early on, was a prime example of prestige planning – seeking to establish from the beginning that Esperanto was capable of conveying the highest expressions of the human imagination, marking it out as a serious language worthy of serious study. Zamenhof’s efforts bore less fruit than he hoped, but his intent was clear.

In short, Esperanto is a textbook case not only of planned language but of language planning. Eco was right: the impulse behind Esperanto was the search for perfectibility. Zamenhof dreamed in 1887 of a “new feeling” pulsing through humankind like some telegraph of the human spirit, of the destruction of the walls dividing the peoples, of a new translingual community. There was a moment when such optimism seemed possible (Harper 2002), before the walls closed in again, leading to two World Wars, the persecution of Esperantists under Stalin (Lins 1988), and the near-destruction of the Jewish people who had provided the model for Zamenhof’s Esperanto community. Only one member of Zamenhof’s direct family made it to 1945. He is an enthusiastic speaker of the language. Thus the search goes on.
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APPENDIX

Eugen Mihalski (1897-1937), from AJNO

Rapide
Strečvervas muskoloj . . .
Posthorizontas la suno
Krepuskas la kor’
en sopiro.

Knaras radoj, krakas pordoj,
faufsirenas autoj . . .
Brilas vitroj magazenaj . . .
Kalvas placa rond’.
Čielenas tempopinto
reliefe.
La dekdua.