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Review of the PhD thesis
“Towards a Linguistic Worldview for Artificial Languages”

presented by

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Ida Stria's thesis addresses the question of whether speakers of a planned (or artificial) language, such as Esperanto, have culture-specific and homogeneous ways of categorizing and describing the world. The question of a linguistic worldview (LWV) has recently become a prominent topic in the research of English as a lingua franca. Several authors have stressed the alleged neutrality of English. As it is more often used by non-native speakers than by native speakers, they argue, a type of international English has developed that is shaped by its users and makes non-native speakers the owners of the language (cf., e.g. House 2014: 364, Hülmbauer 2011: 59, Motschenbacher 2013: 31). The term *lingua franca* with its connotation of “fair” or even “free” comes in handy in this context. Others state that “there is no such thing as ‘neutral’ communication, (...)” (Baker 2013: 12). “English (...) cannot be universally valid or correspond to general human traits” (Phillipson 2015: 31). Against the backdrop of these controversies, an application of the concept of a linguistic worldview to a language that has no norm-providing native speakers and therefore presents a genuine *lingua franca* is intriguing.

The thesis consists of the following five chapters: Ch. 1 contains an introduction to the theoretical basis of the approach, the concept of the linguistic worldview established by the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin (ESL) and its crucial concepts (20 pages). Ch. 2 deals with artificial languages (52 pages). Ch. 3 (“Natural vs. artificial”) discusses the properties of artificial languages. It arranges various subtypes along a scale with naturalness and artificiality as the two extreme poles and describes a number of borderline cases (31 pages). Ch. 4 focuses on Esperanto and its speakers (12 pages). Ch. 5 (30 pages) is described as “an attempt to apply theoretically the paradigm of the ESL to artificial languages and some borderline cases”. It includes a proposition for a potential

future study of the linguistic worldview in Esperanto. Ch. 6 (29 pages) describes this in more detail and presents the results of a pilot study carried out in 2015. Final remarks conclude the thesis (about 3 pages).

The detailed description of the basic concepts in the theory of the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin (Bartmiński et al. 2008; Bartmiński 2012, 2013) in chapter 1 includes a historical overview of the origins, which can be traced back to Herder and Humboldt, as well as an introduction to its methodology. The data that the research is based on is obtained by studying definitions in monolingual dictionaries, analysing texts and corpora; in addition, surveys by means of questionnaires are conducted. The method is illustrated using the example of *democracy* analysed in a paper by Grzeszczak (2009) (pp. 22-23).

Mrs Stria presents an in-depth analysis of artificial languages in chapter 2. She explains her choice of the term “artificial” as a general name to encompass various systems “that underwent any kind of planning” (p. 31): universal languages, formal languages, international auxiliary languages (including a priori, a posteriori systems and reduced natural languages), artistic languages (incl. Orwell’s Newspeak as well as Klingon), and modern glossopoeia. The scope of languages that she describes also includes sign languages, pidgins and creoles, and revitalised languages. The author’s presentation of typologies of artificial languages is critical, well-researched and systematic. It becomes obvious how heterogeneous the class of artificial languages is.

In chapter 3, the author uses Hockett’s, Lyon’s and Svadost’s criteria to determine various degrees of naturalness and artificiality for particular languages. The resultant scale (p. 91) might cause controversy among experts in the field of interlinguistics (especially because it is based on various criteria, contains both individual languages and classes of languages, does not explicitly state in which phase of a language’s development planning is exercised and, finally, includes languages that have found different degrees of actual application), the individual decisions about the positions of particular languages on the scale are explained thoroughly, however. All in all, the author shows convincingly that the traditional binary division into artificial and natural languages is untenable. This can be regarded as a confirmation of what several interlinguists have previously argued (e.g. Schubert 1989, Sakaguchi 2003).

Chapter 4 focuses on Esperanto, which is the only artificial language that has successfully developed from a project to a fully-fledged language; the author sees it as “a transitional case between an artificially created language and a fully developed natural language with its own speech community” (p. 6). The chapter is essential to the investigation, as the ESL considers the existence of a subject (not to be understood as the inventor or initiator of an artificial language, but as

a community) the main precondition for an application of its theory of a linguistic world view. The author provides a detailed description of the sociolinguistic situation of Esperanto speakers including a comparison of Esperanto with revitalised languages, minority languages and pidgins and creoles. She agrees with Wood (1979), who characterized the community as “a voluntary, non-ethnic and non-territorial speech community”. The identity of Esperanto speakers is “based on the voluntariness” (p. 122): they constitute less than 1% of the community, are never monolingual and therefore not norm-providing. It is in this chapter that the author devotes a paragraph to the (not uncontroversial) attitude of Esperanto speakers towards Esperanto (p. 122):

Esperanto speakers maintain their identity through an outright rejection of English and efforts to introduce vocabulary built in accordance with the rules laid down by Zamenhof. The need to resist English influences might stem from different sources. On the one hand, small languages fight against the domination of a larger, internationally used language to survive locally. On the other hand, Esperanto as a language designed to facilitate international communication must face competition globally. Purism is therefore not a mere linguistic practice but also a means to create a sense of unity in the speech communities of Esperanto and low-prestige languages.

I suppose that “rules laid down by Zamenhof” is to refer to the principle of word-formation by endogenous means according to §11 of the *Fundamento de Esperanto* (e.g. *tekst-aro* ‘corpus’) (which is probably also what the author means by “synthetic” in ch. 6). It is noteworthy here, however, that the construction of complex words by the adoption of international words – including borrowing from English (e.g. *korpuso* ‘corpus’) – does not contradict the “rules laid down by Zamenhof”, as it is in accordance with §15 of the *Fundamento*.

In ch. 5, the author discusses the application of the ESL theory to artificial languages and bilingual speakers. She focuses on Koutny’s (2010) article, which presents a first empirical analysis on the topic of Esperanto and worldview. Koutny’s questionnaire study (with questions on the grammar and symbolic meanings of specific vocabulary items in Esperanto), responded by 100 participants, serves as a point of departure for the author’s investigation which takes the centre stage in ch. 6.

The author calls her investigation a pilot study. The questionnaire study (containing 16 LWV-related questions in part I and 7 questions on personal data in part II) was performed during the 100th World Esperanto Congress and through the mailing lists of Interlinguistics Studies at Adam Mickiewicz University (Poznań). It would have been good to know which of the 32 respondents belonged to which group, as the conditions of the study can influence the participants’ answers. For example, it can be assumed that members of the IS mailing lists are especially sensitized to aspects of cultural

specificity of Esperanto communication due to their studies at the AMU; similarly, answers might be triggered by parts the specific congress program (e.g., the phrase *nigra truo* ‘black hole’ – p. 165 – in an answer given by a respondent might be caused by an astronomy lecture of the same title at the World Congress; and *Montevideo* – p. 179 – given as an example of an Esperanto symbol might go back to a forum on this topic at the congress). The small number of respondents is the major weakness of the study. Online-based questionnaires would certainly have been more effective, as the author points out herself (p. 181).

Despite its limitations, the questionnaire study provides valuable insights into with regard to the research question and beyond. I would like to highlight three points. The critical remarks should be understood as suggestions for the author’s further research on the topic:

- (1) The cloze test in (14) proves to be a suitable technique of investigation. It is true that the use of *kuracisto/kuracistino* and *flegisto/flegistino* mirrors traditional role division. However, a discussion on the topic should also consider the diverse usage of professional terms in the speech community. Some speakers might have understood *kuracisto* as a generic form including male and female doctors.
- (2) As regards the study of collocations, I welcome the combination of the questionnaire with the use of corpus data and tend to agree on the result that Esperanto collocations are not as restricted as those in ethnic languages (p. 173). Conclusions such as “some forms begin to take over (e.g. *fari demandon* in contrast to *starigi demandon*)” (p. 173) should be drawn with caution, however. *Fari demandon* might be the most frequent form in *tekstaro.com*; *levis/levas demandon* is the most frequent in *wikitrans.com*. L1 influences are in the same way decisive as the character of existing corpora and should be considered in an in-depth analysis.
- (3) The preferred use of *malsanulejo* (in contrast to *hospitalo*) is an important empirical proof of the fact that speakers tend to stick to the more transparent endogenous type of word formation. It contradicts recent claims that Esperanto will have to enlarge its vocabulary and therefore “massively borrow from English”, so that it will finally consist of “a slim core of Esperanto roots that can be learned in a matter of days and a huge periphery of borrowings” (van Parijs “Linguistic Justice for Europe & for the World” 2011, p. 43). This is a finding the author should have related to her sociolinguistic description of the speech community in ch. 4 (see

above). Further research is necessary to validate the results obtained from the pilot study.

The author concludes that her pilot study has verified the hypothesis that “non-native Esperantists indeed transfer their LWVs from their native languages” with regard to cognitive categories, cross-culturally varying symbolic values and grammatical categories (p. 181) and that, in addition, a LWV typical of Esperanto and its speakers is visible in cultural concepts related to the Esperanto movement. With these findings, despite the small number of respondents, the empirical part in ch. 6 cannot be overestimated in its significance for the dissertation. The problem of the heterogeneity of the Esperanto speech community that is bemoaned by the author in her final remarks can be resolved by large groups of participants and the combination of the questionnaire study with other methods of data collection.

With its profound introduction to the ESL worldview theory, in-depth analysis of artificial languages and Esperanto and the empirical study applying the concepts to Esperanto, Ida Stria’s dissertation is no doubt a piece of serious research. I recommend to accept it as a doctoral thesis.

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