

# An International Language

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## Part 1 General

### Introduction

This book is to be a plea for an artificial international auxiliary language, and it will be well at the outset to see what is implied in these adjectives. *Artificial*, i.e. made consciously by one man or a group of men, in contradistinction to such natural languages as English, French, etc., which have been spoken for generations and whose development has chiefly taken place without the individuals being conscious of any changes. But the term “artificial” is apt to create a prejudice against the language we are to deal with, and it will be my business in this book to show how very “natural” such a language may be; I shall therefore prefer to speak of a “constructed” language, and instead of terming the existing languages natural I shall use the more appropriate term *national* languages.

The next adjective was *international*. That is to say that the language is meant to be used not by any one nation or in any one country, but by individuals who though belonging to different nationalities have something they wanted to communicate to one another.

Third: *auxiliary*. This implies that our international language is meant to be only a sort of substitute for national languages whenever these are not capable of serving as means of communication. It is not intended that a new language should supplant the existing languages: no one in his sober senses would think it possible to make all nations forget their own languages and agree on one single substitute for all purposes. But what a great many sensible men and women in many countries do think worth working for, is a state of things in which an educated Englishman when meeting an educated Spaniard or Dutchman or Bulgarian would be pretty certain to be understood if he addressed him in a constructed language adopted for that purpose a state of thing also in which international conferences and congresses on political or scientific or commercial questions would be carried on freely without need of interpreters, and all official documents relating to more than one state would be circulated in a single language. What then we interlinguists are thinking of, is not what Schleyer made the boasting motto of his Volapük, “Menade bal, püki bal” (To one human race, one language), but rather what another inventor of an artificial language, Bollack, took as his motto: The second language to everybody. The new interlanguage would not infringe the sacred rights of the mothertongue, but be used only when two or more persons ignorant of one another’s language had occasion to talk or to write to one another.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In this book I often use the abbreviation I.A.L. for International Auxiliary Language, also sometimes I.L.

### Need for an Interlanguage

An American may travel from Boston to San Francisco without hearing more than one language. But if he were to traverse the same distance on this side of the Atlantic, he would have a totally different story to tell. Suppose he started from Oslo and journeyed to the South or South-East: he would then hear perhaps Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, German, Czechoslovakian, Hungarian, Rumanian, Bulgarian, Turkish, Greek, and then in Egypt Arabic and a little English twelve different languages, of which the majority would be utterly unintelligible to him.

And yet he would not have heard half of the languages spoken in Europe. The curse of Babel is still with us. How many people have been in situations where they have felt the barriers of language a serious drawback, where they have been desirous to communicate freely with someone, ask questions, obtain or impart information, etc., which has been rendered impossible by their own and the other party’s want of sufficient linguistic knowledge! It is not very pleasant to be engaged in a discussion that interests you, if you feel that while you have the best arguments the other man has the whip hand of you, because the conversation is in *his* native

language, in which you are able to express only what you can, while he can say everything he wants to. In scientific congresses, as Professor Pfaundler says, “only very few can take part in the discussions, and many must be well content if they are able to understand the usually rapidly delivered papers. Many an important criticism is not made because one does not possess the ability to discuss a question in a foreign language, and does not wish to expose oneself to the chance of a rebuff, caused not so much by ignorance of the matter in hand as by want of facility in expression. Every member of a congress has noticed that whenever the language employed in the papers changes, a considerable number of the audience leave with more or less noise, in order to avoid being compelled to listen to a paper which they do not understand.”

Sometimes in international discussions the three chief languages are allowed, and each separate speech has to be translated into the two others. I was present at such a congress in Copenhagen in 1910 and saw how intolerable this dragging repetition must necessarily be, not least to those who like myself understood English, French and German with perfect ease: anything like a real vivid discussion was excluded by the inevitable delays not to mention the inadequacy of many of the extempore translations.

With regard to printed works matters are somewhat better, but not quite satisfactory. Most scientific men are nowadays able to read books and papers on their own special subject in the three chief languages, English, German and French; but that is no longer sufficient. One of the most important features of the last hundred years is the nationality-movement, in politics, in literature, in art, in everything. Even small nations want to assert themselves and fly their own colours on every occasion, by way of showing their independence of their mightier neighbours. The growing improvement in higher education everywhere has fortunately made it possible to print books on scientific matters even in languages spoken by comparatively small nations. But what is a benefit to these countries themselves, may in some cases be detrimental to the world at large, and even to authors, in so far as thoughts that deserved diffusion all over the globe are now made accessible only to a small fraction of those that should be interested in them. In my own field, I have had occasion to see the way in which excellent work written in Danish which might have exerted a deep influence on contemporary linguistic thought has remained practically unknown outside of Scandinavia. (See my book *Language* under Rask and Bredsdorff; I might have mentioned Westergaard and Thomsen as well.) The late secretary of the Berlin Academy, the eminent classical scholar H. Diels, says: “Incalculable are the intellectual losses incurred every year in consequence of the national hobby of small, but highly gifted scientifically active peoples who insist that scientific works (which cannot all of them be translated) should appear in their own, narrowly circumscribed languages.” For my own part, though I have spent most of my life studying different languages, I have sometimes been obliged to lay aside as unread books and papers which I should have liked very much to study, but which happened to be written in a tongue with which I was not sufficiently familiar.

## **Ignorance of Foreign Languages**

Kant was first made known to Edinburgh in 1803 not in the German original, but through a French translation. John Stuart Mill was able, though with difficulty, to read German, but preferred reading translations, and never learnt to shift for himself in a German railway station. When Carlyle met Louis Blanc, “it was the veriest fun to watch their conversation. Carlyle's French was a literal translation of his own untranslatable English, uttered too in his own broad Scotch. Louis Blanc could not at all understand him, but would listen attentively, and then answer very wide of the mark.” (Car. Fox.) Faraday knew no German, and consequently Robert Mayer's and Helmholtz's investigations were a “sealed book” to him. “How different,” said Dean Stanley, “might have been the case of the Church of England if Newman had been able to read German.” When a German scholar sent an annotated edition of *Macbeth* to Dr. Furnivall, the director of the New Shakespeare Society, the Early English Text Society, etc., the latter wrote back to regret that he could not read the notes, but that he saw from the figures that the author had gone into metrical questions. When Zola fled from France during the Dreyfus troubles, he was utterly unable to make himself understood in English. And the same was the

case with the Danish poet Herman Bang, who died miserably in America in 1912 unable to make his simplest wants understood by those about him.

Nor is a similar inability unknown among statesmen. It is said that it was injurious to Denmark in her difficult political situation in the middle of the last century, that Madvig (the great Latin scholar) and other ministers spoke French with difficulty and felt shy of talking bad French to the foreign ambassadors. Similar things are reported from the World War. Sir Edward Grey could not speak French, and the French ambassador, Cambon, spoke bad English. None of the French or English generals, with the exception of Lord Kitchener, spoke the other nations's language at all well, and at the Peace Conference Clemenceau gained an undue ascendancy because he was practically the only one who had complete command of both languages. It requires no unusual amount of wisdom to understand that confidential talks between mighty statesmen of different nationalities on topics of world-wide importance lose a great deal if they have to be carried on by means of interpreters: how much better if the mighty of this earth were able to meet on an equal footing linguistically speaking but that could only be possible by means of a perfectly neutral language.

It is true that we have translators and interpreters, but good and efficient translators are neither plentiful nor very cheap. I take from Miss Pankhurst's book the bit of information that during 1926 the Geneva staff of the League of Nations included 29 translators and interpreters at salaries amounting to £19,800 besides shorthand writers and typists. And then, the League is only a modest beginning of that vast political organization of the whole world which has to come in a not too distant future! In these days of cheap travel, of commercial interchange between all parts of the world, of airplanes and broadcasting, of international science and of world-politics, it seems an urgent need for merchants, technical men, scientists, literary men, politicians, in fact for everybody, to have an easy means of getting into touch with foreigners and of learning more from them than is possible by visiting other countries as tongue-tied tourists. The word "international" was only invented by Jeremy Bentham in 1780 nowadays we have come to the point of needing an international language.

Let me mention here also the recent invention of the speaking film, which is now being brought to a rare technical perfection. When Axel Petersen and Arnold Poulsen's "phono-film" was shown to a small audience in Copenhagen, my thought leapt out to the time when by this means it would be possible to have plays and speeches made visible and audible and comprehensible all over the world the advantages of cinema and radio combined and made still more useful by means of an Interlanguage!

## **An Existing Language?**

A great many people will stop here and say: yes, we grant that it would be desirable to have one single language used everywhere, but would it not be best to select one of the existing languages and use that in all communications between two or more nations, even if no one of those concerned knew that language as his own mother-tongue? The answer is that a deliberate choice of any one language for such a purpose would meet with unsurmountable difficulties on account of international jealousies. Frenchmen and Germans alike would fight tooth and nail against a proposal to make English a universally recognised international language, Frenchmen and Englishmen against German, etc. and quite naturally too, for such a choice would mean an enormous handicapping of all other nations. Nor would it be possible to make all nations agree on the selection of a language of a smaller nation: visionaries have, as a matter of fact, proposed Norwegian and Armenian! It would require a good deal of compulsion to make people all over the world take up the study of either of these languages, and to the nation thus put in the linguistically most-favoured position it would be a doubtful boon to see its beloved tongue mutilated and trampled under foot everywhere, as would inevitably be the result.

One day, when I was discussing these matters with a famous Belgian historian and complaining of the difficulty felt by men of science who happened to be born in a small country, he said: Instead of writing in an artificial language, it will be much better for you Danes to write in French; if the matter is good enough, we shall read it with pleasure, even if it be bad French. I

replied that no one can help being to some extent irritated to read his own language disfigured by faults in grammar and phraseology, and that a Dane would find it much easier to learn to write Ido (or now Novial) perfectly than to learn to write even very faulty French; he would be spared that unpleasant feeling of inferiority which he must always have when trying to write a serious book or paper in a foreign national language.

## Latin?

Latin was for centuries the international tongue of the higher intellectual world, and it is still used extensively in the Roman Catholic Church: why not then revive it for all purposes? It would certainly have the advantage of being neutral and thus avoid the objections just mentioned. To those few scholars who dream of this rôle for Latin the reply is obvious: Latin has had that position, and has lost it irrevocably in consequence of the natural development of the last three centuries or more. Even classical scholars use Latin very little nowadays in their scientific papers. And outside their narrow circles very few people are now able to read, still less to speak or write, Latin in spite of the great number of hours devoted to that language in many schools. How many scientists would now be able to read Newton's or Tycho Brahe's works in the original? And how many are there who read even such excellent works as Erasmus's *Encomium Moriae* or Holberg's *Nicolaus Climius* in Latin? When it comes to expressing the ideas of our own day, the deficiencies of classical Latin appear with ruthless clarity: telephones and motor-cars and wireless have no room in Ciceronian Latin, and it will be of little use to coin Neolatin words for these and other modern inventions, for the whole structure of the language with its intricate forms and complex syntax, which tempts the writer to twisted sentences, has become so utterly antiquated that we of the twentieth century wince at the idea of having to clothe our thoughts in that garb. Recently G. de Reynold in two remarkable articles (in the *Revue de Genève*, May and June 1925) after a scathing criticism of the barbarisms of Esperanto and after a condemnation of the idea of an artificial language, which in my view is exaggerated and unjust brought forward the proposal to use as an international language not classical Latin, but the Latin of the Middle Ages, with its simplified sentence constructions (*quod* instead of infinite clauses, etc.) and even further modernizations: he thinks it will be easy for a conference of philologists and experts of all countries to agree on a system for adapting Latin forms and phraseology to contemporary uses. This is to my mind much more Utopian than such a scheme as that advocated below: for where is such a conference to begin, and where to end? Irregular verbs? I think most lovers of Latin will object to a simplification of *sum, es, est*, and where are we to draw the line in the use of the subjunctive and the ablative, etc. etc.? Further as to the meanings and uses of words: is *bellum classium* to mean naval warfare or war of the classes in the modern sense? *Redactio, sociologia, eventualitas, fixatio, realismus, radicalismus, jurista, vegetarianus* and similar coinages would, of course, have to be admitted in spite of the protests of classicists, but what is to be done with *radium* and *radio*, not as case forms of *radius*, but as independent words? Hundreds of similar questions would inevitably arise, and the conference would probably split up into small groups representing the most diverging standpoints some advocating the Latin of the Vulgate, others that of Erasmus, while some would simplify inflexions in a few points and others in a great many more, even down to partisans of Peano's *Latino sine flexione*, which in the eyes of not a few scholars is a barbarous profanation of the Latin they love, and which is evidently very far from de Reynold's idea. Even after a repeated reading of his eloquent plea I cannot help looking on Latin as irretrievably dead, at any rate for our purposes, which should cover the interests not only of scholars, but also of merchants, technicians, politicians and other men of the practical world. It is no use saying that Latin culture and through it the Latin language has pervaded and is pervading modern life in thousands of ways: no one denies that, and therefore great parts of the Latin language must necessarily be incorporated in our Interlanguage of the future but only those parts which have proved their vitality by surviving in the languages actually now spoken that is the test of what we can use and what not.

The decisive reason, however, why we must oppose the adoption of one of the existing languages, living or dead, is that each of them is several times more difficult than a constructed

language need be and than those constructed languages are already which have any chance of being selected; while in Part II I shall try to show that it is possible in some respects to go further in simplification than most of the proposed artificial languages have gone. It will now be our task to consider those objections which are constantly raised against the idea of a constructed language and to show that they are far from being conclusive.

## Objections to Constructed Languages

Objections are raised both by professional philologists (linguists) and by laymen. Among the former I must here specially mention the two leaders of German comparative linguistics, Brugmann and Leskien, but their attacks were made at the time when Esperanto was beginning to gain favour, and later languages have avoided not a few of the imperfections found fault with by the two Leipzig professors. In 1925 Professor G. Güntert in his *Grundfragen der Sprachwissenschaft* tried to reduce the whole idea *ad absurdum*, but on the basis of so deficient a knowledge of the facts of the case and with so prejudiced a mind that he proved less than nothing. It would be a very great mistake to suppose that professional philologists as a body are against constructed languages; it would be much more correct to say that those among them who have gone most into the question are the best disposed to them. I may mention here among those who have spoken in favour of the idea *in abstracto*, Schuchardt, Vilh. Thomsen and Meillet three of the greatest stars in the philological world and among those who have actually taken part in the International Language Movement, Baudouin de Courtenay, Ernst Kock, Wallensköld, Collinson and Sapir, all of them university professors.

People who hear about constructed languages will often say that such a language must be as lifeless as a dead herring, and that we may just as well think of setting up an homunculus made in a chemical retort and claiming for it the qualities of a living human being. Languages are not organisms, and their "life" is not to be compared with that of animals or plants. Forty years ago Schuchardt was able to make short work of this objection by showing how much in the so-called natural languages was really artificial, that is, due to conscious endeavours and conscious selection, and yet was just as capable of "living" as anything else. What we have to do is to study existing languages and their history so as to find out the actual laws of their development and then build on what has most vitality.

## Differences in an Interlanguage

A further objection is this: such a language can never be exactly alike in the mouths of all who use it; there will always be a good many divergences and differences. But could not the same thing be said of any existing language? English is spoken in many ways, differing according to localities and to classes and sets of people. What is essential in one as well as in the other case is that there should be so much practical agreement that mutual understanding is possible and as a matter of fact that has been attained in the case of more than one constructed language.

"An Englishman and a Frenchman will never be able to pronounce the same words in the same way." In this form the statement is not exact: modern practical language-teaching on the basis of phonetics has shown possibilities in this direction which former times could not suspect; but further, phonetic schooling and training is needed to a far less extent in the case of a constructed language than when it is a question of teaching a foreign national language, with its many fine nuances which it is necessary to know and to observe if one wants to have a good pronunciation, and on which we must therefore at present insist in our schools. The phonetic system of a constructed language should be very simple indeed and is so in the case of all recent schemes. Volapük had German ü and ö, which are easy enough for a Frenchman and a Scandinavian, but not for an Englishman, a Spaniard or a Russian, though a few hours training after a phonetic explanation will suffice to enable anyone to pronounce these sounds; but Esperanto and several other constructed languages have shown how easy it is to dispense with these vowels so as to have only the five vowels *a, e, i, o, u* (pronounced in the continental way): sound which no nation find difficult. Similarly with consonants: if the language is really constructed on a sensible plan, a sufficient degree of phonetic agreement can easily be obtained

even among people who start from such different sound-systems as French and English. It must be remembered that the fewer the distinctive sounds (the “phonemes”) which one has in a language, the wider the margin of correctness which can be allowed to each sound without infringing on the domain of its neighbour, and thus running the risk of a word being misheard for another.

But we need not linger over theoretical considerations: the practical experiences of Volapükists, Esperantists and Idists in their congresses and informal meetings has shown every participant that the fears of sceptics are groundless with regard to pronunciation. “Ab esse ad posse valet consequentia”: when one has actually seen a thing, one cannot any longer doubt that it is possible. As for myself, I was present at a meeting of the Philological Society of London in 1887, at a time when I was an utter disbeliever in artificial languages, and there I heard an Englishman and a German speaking Volapük and understanding one another perfectly in that curious tongue. Later I have heard Esperanto and Ido spoken by people of a great many nationalities and have been able as a phonetician to observe the ease with which they were able to converse with one another on various topics. It should also be remembered that as an interlanguage is chiefly spoken when men and women from different countries meet, they will naturally tend to rub off the peculiarities of their national pronunciations. This was the experience related by a French Idist after a visit to English Idists: “During the first sentences there was an appreciable difference between our pronunciations; but gradually and pretty rapidly, on account of the very necessity of making ourselves understood, each of us adapted himself to the other, my English host giving a clear enunciation to all syllables, and myself paying more attention to stress than when I am talking Ido with my countrymen. After some moments, we struck, as it were, the same middle note” (*Progreso*, 4.429). I am perfectly sure that a similar mutual adaptation has taken place very often, and will take place again whenever interlinguists meet together from various countries with the sincere wish of getting full benefit from the conversation. The more such a language is spoken at international gatherings, the more will everybody's pronunciation quite naturally approach the ideal average. It will further be said that there are difficulties arising from the form-system of any constructed language, which people with different morphologies in their own language will not be able to overcome. If the interlanguage distinguishes four cases, as Volapük did on account of the idiosyncrasies of its German inventor, Englishmen will constantly stumble at these rules.

Quite so; therefore recent schemes avoid such complications. Nothing can be concluded from imperfect schemes, except just this, that we must make the interlanguage of the future more perfect, i.e. simpler. Volapük made the error of having four cases; Esperanto made a simpler, though lesser, mistake with its compulsory accusative, used not only for the direct object, but also without preposition to indicate the place to (or towards) which. The simpler the morphological structure is, the less inducement will there be to make grammatical mistakes from a recollection of the grammatical rules of one's native language. But that simplicity does not mean that the language we construct is to be a kind of “Pidgin” incapable of expressing nuances of thought which are necessary to highly cultivated Europeans. I have devoted a long chapter of my book *Language* to a study of Pidgin English, Beach-la-Mar and similar exotic minimum-languages or makeshift-languages, so I speak with some knowledge of the matter when I say that the interlanguage I am advocating in this book is totally different from such languages through being expressive and efficient, though extremely simple in its grammatical structure.

The following objection is found in various forms even in quite recent articles, and it cannot be denied that it carries a certain weight. Everybody will necessarily transfer some of his speech-habits to the international language, which will thus be coloured differently in word order, phraseology, etc. according to the native language underlying each user's way of thinking. There is, however, not so much in that objection as one might imagine beforehand, and here, too, we have already a good deal of experience gathered through practical work with various interlanguages. As a matter of fact a great many people have learnt how to express their thoughts in a constructed language in such a fashion as to be easily understood by people

starting from very different national languages. Personally I have read articles and received letters, chiefly in Ido, but also in Esperanto and Occidental, written from not a few countries, Russia, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Hungary, etc., and expressed so accurately that I could hardly detect a single trace of the writers' nationality, though I do not deny that some correspondents lacked this power of effacing their mother-tongue. Some Russians will feel inclined to use *sua* instead of *mea*, when the subject of the sentence is "me," etc. No language, not even a simple interlanguage, can be learnt without some instruction, either through the mouth of a teacher, or through a book, or through both; and it must be the chief and foremost task of an instructor to warn his pupils against these idiomatic turns and expressions which cannot be easily understood abroad. It requires very little linguistic knowledge on the part of an Englishman to understand that he should avoid translating phrases like "put up with," "how do you do?" "go in for," etc., word for word into any foreign language. "Take place" means something different from "Platz nehmen." During the war a German paper was indignant and took it as a sign of the cruelty of English girls that one had written to her "young man" the following threat: "I will cut you dead unless you enlist at once"; the German translated: "Ich will dich zerhacken," and took it literally!

The all-important rule in dealing with an interlanguage must always be not to translate word for word from one's native language, but to render the thought itself in its simplest form. This of course requires some mental discipline and amounts to saying that a constructed language cannot be expected to fulfil all the functions and uses to which a national language can be put. It must necessarily remain an intellectual language, a language for the brain, not for the heart; it can never expect to give expression to those deep emotions which find their natural outlet through a national language. There will always be something dry and prosaic about it, and it is a mistake to try and translate very deep poetry in it, for it will be capable of rendering only those elements of poetry which might as well have been expressed through a paraphrase in native prose. But all this does not hinder a constructed language from being eminently useful in very many practical affairs of the utmost importance. This leads us to the following consideration.

### **Not so Good as Existing Languages**

An objection<sup>1</sup> which is often raised against constructed languages is that they can never be as good as natural languages. It is true that our Interlanguage is not as rich as English, not as elegant as French, not as vigorous as German, not as beautiful as Italian, not as full of nuances as Russian, not as "homelike" as our mother-tongue. But note this well, that all these good qualities, which one appreciates and praises in the national languages, are found only when they are spoken or written by natives. And the Interlanguage may very well be richer than the English spoken by a Frenchman, more elegant than French as spoken by a Dane, more vigorous than the German of some Italians, more beautiful than the Italian of the English, more full of nuances than the Russian of Germans, and more homelike than my own tongue spoken by Russians. And as our language is an auxiliary language, it can only be compared fairly with natural languages as spoken by foreigners; and then neither Ido nor Novial need feel ashamed of itself.

<sup>1</sup> This and the following paragraphs are the translation of the Novial text found below among specimens.

### **Future Differentiations**

From linguists (philologists) one very often hears the following objection: even if all inhabitants of the earth learnt one and the same language, the unity would soon disappear, and different languages would arise in the same way as the Romanic languages were produced by the splitting up of Latin.

Against this objection I have two critical remarks: in the first place, the argument from linguistic history is not sound; and secondly, if it were, that should not hinder us from working for an international language.

It is quite true that the history of languages often shows us a tendency to differentiation: it is well known that most European languages have taken their origin from one and the same language. But the tendency towards differentiation is by no means inevitable. Those who

believe that a language must everywhere and always break up into a number of dialects forget the most important law of linguistic biology, namely that constant intercourse creates linguistic unity, even where it did not exist, and that discontinuance of intercourse produces linguistic differences where there was once unity. If after the colonization of Iceland the Icelandic tongue came to be different from Norwegian, this was due to the cessation of constant communication, and if nowadays the speech of California is in perfect agreement in all essential points with that of Boston, this is due to the fact that the inhabitants of the western and eastern parts of America are in very active intercourse with one another. Antiquity witnessed many cases of differentiation of languages; we nowadays see more of the reverse process dialects are everywhere disappearing, and unity is constantly increasing: an ever-growing number of people speaking the great national unity-languages. Thus the only condition under which an international language once adopted would split up into different languages, would be the want of constant intercourse; if for example a colony of Novialists (or Esperantists) emigrated to a previously uninhabited land, and lived there entirely isolated from the rest of the world. But such a supposition is evidently absurd, and we must insist that as long as an interlanguage continues to be useful in its true function as an aid to intercourse between different countries, there is no danger that it will suffer the fate that befell Latin, when that language was split up into the Romanic languages.

Even if we admit for a moment the possibility and probability of such a differentiation, this ought not to deter us from working for an international language and speaking it. Those who think that any language must by a natural law necessarily and fatally differentiate, will nevertheless speak their mothertongue every day without being afraid that in accordance with that fatal law it will split up under their hands. And this is quite natural, for such a differentiation is not a matter of a moment; it will take some time, even a long time, and we may confidently assert that it will not take place during our lives. We can thus say: After us the deluge! But, as I have already said, I do not believe that even after us the dreaded linguistic deluge will take place.

## Number of Proposed Languages

A criticism which is much more serious in its consequences is this: people will never agree on one single artificial language to be used everywhere. A great many interlanguages have been proposed, and new ones spring up on all sides. One of these may be just as good as another, and if some have had a certain vogue and have gathered a troop of adherents, this success has in each case been only temporary, so that each new scheme must be prepared to share the fate of Volapük, which had its heyday of triumph forty years ago and is now totally forgotten.

This objection would certainly be decisive, if the construction of an interlanguage were entirely arbitrary and dependent on an inventor's fancy, and if, on the other hand, the choice between various schemes depended exclusively on the public's whimsical preferences. But fortunately neither of these premises is correct, as we shall see when we cast a glance at the history of the international language movement, and more particularly at its more recent phases.

## History

If I were writing the history of the Interlanguage movement,<sup>1</sup> I should first deal with the great theorists, who have espoused and advocated this idea as such Descartes, Comenius, Leibniz, Schuchardt, Ostwald and then with those who have made contributions to the practical solution of the question, among whom I should give prominence to Pirro, Schleyer, Zamenhof, Couturat, Rosenberger and de Wahl. But here I am more concerned with the future than with the past, and shall therefore content myself with the briefest mention of those facts from which I think a conclusion can be drawn that may assist us in paving the way for a future adoption of a rational interlanguage.

<sup>1</sup> The standard work is L. Couturat et L. Leau, *Histoire de la langue universelle* (Paris 1903) with its continuation, *Les nouvelles langues internationales* (Paris 1907). The history since 1907 has not yet been written; much is contained in the seven big volumes of *Progreso*, the periodical of the Idists. See also A. L. Guérard, *A Short History of the International Language Movement* (London 1922) and the



very short abstract in E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *Delphos, the Future of International Language* (London 1927). The two latter works are not reliable in every minute particular, but give on the whole a readable presentation of the chief facts.

## Volapük

J. M. Schleyer brought out his *Volapük* in 1880, and towards the end of the eighties his adherents numbered hundreds of thousands; great congresses were held, and books and periodicals appeared in the new language in great numbers all over the civilized world. But a few years later the “craze”, as it was called, passed as suddenly as it had appeared. What, then, were the causes of this sudden success and equally sudden failure?

If the boom showed that the world really wanted such a medium, and that Volapük was possessed of some of the qualities required in an international language, the decline and fall showed that the want was not great enough to support a language of such an imperfect structure. For Volapük was a most curious mixture of good and bad. Greatly to its credit were its phonetic alphabet, the perfect regularity of all its forms, and the fullness of its vocabulary which permitted it to express all necessary ideas and to be the vehicle of translation of literary works. For the first time in the history of the world one saw men and women from the most distant countries meeting together and conversing in an artificially constructed tongue. The machinery worked, but not without some creaking and grating of the wheels.

Very soon adherents began to ask questions of a kind which beginners also ask with regard to natural languages: why is this so and not otherwise? If a child learning French asks, why is a horse called *cheval*, and why should this word have *-aux* in the plural, he naturally gets the answer: it *is* like that, and you cannot change it, but must take the language as it is. But a man constructing an artificial language must be prepared constantly to state his reasons why such and such an idea is to be expressed in this way rather than in any other way, and why this or that grammatical form or rule has been adopted. And those questions were extremely difficult to answer in the case of Volapük, because nearly everything rested on the individual fancies or whims of its inventor. It is true that when you come to examine it more carefully, you discover that there is some system underlying the whole structure, but that system is highly arbitrary and necessitates (seemingly or really) capricious distortions of the best-known words. Most of the words are taken from European languages, especially English, and yet when one sees a page of Volapük, one hardly recognises a single word of it. There are no end of prefixes and suffixes to express minute shades (tense, number, person, mood, etc.), and as each prefix ends with a vowel, and each suffix begins with a vowel, it follows that the stem itself must always begin and end with a consonant. Accordingly *Academy* becomes *kadem*. *R* is avoided: *fire* is *fil*, and *red led*. As *s* is the sign of the plural, no word may end in *s*: *rose* is made into *lol*.

As *ne* is the negative, such a word as *necessity* is clipped of its initial syllable and becomes *zesüid*. Not even proper names get off scot-free: *Italy* is *Täl*, and *England* *Nelij* (*j* pronounced *sh*). *Europe* is *Yulop*, and the other continents, which happen in their natural names to begin and end in vowels, must don the same uniform and are made into *Melop*, *Silop*, *Filop*, and *Talop* respectively. Very ingenious, isn't it?

No wonder that after the first wave of enthusiasm had passed, some Volapükists began to ask: are all these contortions really necessary? Would it not be better to keep wellknown words nearer to their natural forms? But when people called for reforms of this or that particular, Schleyer, who had been hailed with the title *Datuval*, i.e. Great Inventor, took offence and claimed an absolute veto in matters of his own language, and as sensible Volapükists were not inclined to grant that, the body broke up and that was the end of the first great drama of “Interlanguage”.

## Esperanto

In the next act history repeats itself, but, as usual, with some modification. When the Polish oculist L. L. Zamenhof first brought out his “Lingvo Internacia de la Doktoro Esperanto” in 1887, he was at once met with the objection, that he came to late because the choice of a world-language had already been settled once and for all by the then undisputed success of Volapük,

but he was sensible enough to answer that Schleyer's adherents, however superior in number to his own, represented only a very small minority of civilized mankind and were not powerful enough to rule out of court a language which was much better in every way than Volapük. Time has shown that he was right as time will show that those anti-Esperantists are right who nowadays use the same argument against Esperantists who boast of the number of their adherents.

In the first years the progress of Esperanto was very slow indeed people were sick of the idea of an artificial language after the fiasco of Volapük and enthusiastic as Zamenhof's few first followers were, they soon began to criticize details in his creation. He himself was not averse to changes, and in 1894 even put forward a comprehensive scheme of reform, which if it had been accepted would have changed the whole aspect of the language, and done away with some of those features of Esperanto which have always ruffled people more than anything else: the circumflexed letters, the fanciful "correlative" words, the accusative, the *aj's* and *oj's*, etc. Unfortunately, these sensible reforms were tied up with things of a much more doubtful character, and the conservative elements in the very small body of Esperantists carried the day, as they did on later occasions, when the number of believers had increased very considerably, and when they did everything to hinder reforms and to hush up Zamenhof's own half-hearted proposals of change (even so late as 1907 he sent to the Delegation a few proposals of that kind). In such matters there will always be some who think that the all-important thing is unity, so that it matters little whether a language be relatively perfect or not, so long as it is the only one in use. Conservative Esperantists looking back on the history of Volapük thought the cause of its downfall lay exclusively in the squabbles of its adherents, while it really lay deeper, in the defects of the language, which invited criticism on so many points. So a great party among Esperantists shut their eyes to the imperfections of Zamenhof's system and gradually worked themselves up into such a state of admiration that their "kara majstro" became the equivalent of the "Datuval" of a former period, the "Fundamento," which embodied the grammar and chief vocabulary of his language, became a thing that must on no account be "touched" (*Netushebleco*, as they say).

Now it is undeniable that this language of Zamenhof's is a remarkable achievement, which must have struck those who came to it fresh from Schleyer's Volapük as an entirely new and better world. Zamenhof took some things from previous schemes, from Volapük the preposition *al*, the word *dom* 'house' (as in Latin and Russian, but with a different meaning from that found in West-European languages; the same *dom* has been taken over into Ido and Occidental), from Steiner's Pasingua the accusative in *-n*, from Schipfer the rule that the accusative is used without a preposition for movement towards or to, from Pirro *-in* as a feminine ending and a good many German words (*bald*, *warm*, *hund*, *vund*, *somer*), see also below on the play of vowels in the verbal tenses, but he works all these elements into one harmonious whole. It is true that his inflexional endings and most of his suffixes are just as arbitrary as those of Volapük, but they are better distinguished from the root syllable or syllables; besides they are much fewer and yet enable one to express by simple means a good many shades of thought. A great stride forward is the doing away with verbal endings to indicate person and number. So, on the whole, there is much to admire in the system of 1887, though it is easy to see now that it was far from being perfect.

As for the vocabulary it is often said, by Esperantists and antagonists alike, that Zamenhof's genius showed itself in the way in which he took words with hardly any change from existing languages. This, of course, is the reason why a page of Esperanto looks ever so much more familiar than a page of Volapük. But Zamenhof was not the first to take his words from the best-known languages (see Couturat and Leau, 239-303), and I must here especially mention *Pirro*, whose book written in 1868 is very little known, but is one to which I constantly recur with the greatest admiration, because it embodies principles which were not recognized till much later. Let me give one little illustration, which will show how much more modern this language looks than Esperanto:

*Nos habe el honor, meni senior, informaten evos ke nos habe kreated in dit plats un kommerkant-haus sub el nom de N. Nos vove enos exklauslit ad exsekusion de li konmitsion ex fremd, tant per kauf ke per vend de li merkantnes.*

Zamenhof, like the authors of all subsequent schemes, took most of his words from the vocabulary common to Romanic languages and English, much of which has also made its way into German, Russian, etc., but he was not really guided by any fixed principles either in his selection or in his phonetic treatment of words. When a word which he wanted to use was refractory in one way or another and might cause ambiguities, he modified it, not quite so violently as Schleyer did, but still without any scruples. *Port* might represent F *porte* 'door' and F *porter* 'to carry': the first is therefore turned into *pordo*, with a *d*, which is found in no existing language. In order to use the French conjunction *car*, which with *k* would be in conflict with *kar* 'dear' and with *c* with *car* 'tsar, czar,' Zamenhof simply puts his circumflex over *c*: *ĉar* (*char*). The word *nepre* is nothing but the first two syllables of Russian *nepremenko* just as if for the same idea he had taken *unbe* from German *unbedingt*. The most curious example is *edzino* 'wife,' which is taken from the ending of German *kron-prinzessin* arbitrarily modified; then, as -in is the feminine suffix, *edzo* comes to mean husband, and *edzighi* to marry. Place-names are changes so that they may receive the substantive-ending -o: *Parizo*, etc., and the names of countries are reduced to a uniformity, which recalls Volapük: *Rusujo* Russia, *Anglujo*, *Svisujo*, etc. The vogue of Esperanto dates from about the beginning of the century, more especially from the great success of the first congress (Boulogne 1905). Thousands were fired with enthusiasm. Grammars, textbooks, periodicals, translations of works of many different kinds appeared in all parts of the world, and a most energetic propaganda led to the result not that the language was adopted everywhere, but that the man in the street identified the notion of "International language" with "Esperanto," a confusion which has been and is highly injurious to the realization of the idea of an interlanguage; for any one seeing Esperanto and realizing that this cannot possibly be the world-language of the future will be tempted to draw the erroneous conclusion that no such language will ever be adopted. When in an Esperanto book one stumbles on the word *ghistiamajn* and succeeds in making out that it means 'previous' and is a compound of the following elements, *ghis* (*gh* or *g* with a circumflex, pronounced like English *j*) up to, *tiam* then, *a* adjective ending, *j* plural, *n* accusative, then one cannot help asking oneself in the face of so much ingenuity if it is really necessary for an auxiliary language to be made up of such utterly arbitrary elements a question to which the whole of the subsequent history (and of the second part of this book) gives an emphatic answer in the negative.

## Idiom Neutral

The first decades after the birth of Esperanto contributed several books on the question with new "languages," most of them written by former Volapükists, and containing vocabularies based on West-European languages with more or less artificial grammars. None of them had any practical influence, but those of Lott, Liptay and Heintzeler deserve mention here, because they show a growing consciousness, that the task is not so much to invent a language as to find out what is already in international use, and to utilize that to the utmost extent. All the while some members of the Volapük Academy were patiently and steadily at work under the presidency of W. Rosenberger of St. Petersburg, and when finally they brought out their language under the title of *Idiom Neutral* (1902), it turned out to be something as different from Volapük as day is from night. In the vocabulary, the maximum of internationality had been aimed at, this being calculated by counting how many of the seven principal languages contained a particular word. The result was a language that could be read with comparative ease by every educated person. On the whole, we have here a very conscientious piece of work, which has deeply influenced all subsequent schemes, though as a system it gained very few adherents, probably because its grammar was inadequate in various points, and because too little had been done to avoid disturbing homophones; moreover its many consonant-groups (e.g. *nostr patr* "our Father") made the language far from euphonious.

Among numerous systems of the same type, but not worked out to the same extent as Neutral, I shall here mention only H. Molenaar's *Universal* (1906).

## The Delegation. Ido.

The number of such schemes, each perhaps with some good points, but none of them in every respect superior to the rest, was disquieting to several earnest friends of the idea of an interlanguage, who were, not without reason, afraid that puffing advertisements, political intrigues, or monetary influences might some day force on the world an auxiliary language which was not quite good enough for the purpose. They also felt that if they now learnt one language and perhaps used it for bringing out an important scientific work, they might find in a few years' time that that system had been abandoned in favour of another one. This anxiety gave rise to the "Délégation pour l'adoption d'une langue auxiliaire internationale" (1900). Under the able and energetic leadership of the French philosopher L. Couturat signatures were gathered chiefly from scientific bodies and men of science for the proposal that the final selection of an international language should be left to some authoritative committee, preferably the "Association internationale des Académies," which comprised all the most important scientific Academies of the world. As, however, the Association declined the task, the Delegation in 1907 thought the time had come to appoint a Committee of its own to select the best auxiliary language for international use.

Under the presidency of the famous chemist W. Ostwald this Committee held a long series of meetings in Paris, in which we discussed the chief projects that had appeared down to that time. Inventors had been invited to appear and defend their schemes, and some made use of this opportunity. Esperantists made an unsuccessful attempt at intimidating the Committee into accepting Esperanto *en bloc* on account of its having more adherents at the moment than all the other projects counted together. It soon turned out that there were really only two schemes in existence that could receive serious consideration, Esperanto and Idiom Neutral, and that it was out of the question to accept either of them in its then shape, and very difficult to combine the good elements of the two into one harmonious whole.<sup>1</sup>

Then, one day, we found on our tables an anonymous pamphlet said to be written by "Ido," no one of us at the time suspecting that under this name was hidden Louis de Beaufront, one of the leading French Esperantists, who on account of his supposed conservatism had just been chosen by Zamenhof to represent him and to defend Esperanto before the Delegation Committee (this, by the way, he had done with great eloquence and skill, laying chief stress on those points in the structure of Esperanto which were kept unchanged by "Ido," and which were criticized in the meetings, by myself more than by anybody else). But this anonymous project struck in some ways that middle course between the two rival languages, of which we were in search, and likewise embodied Couturat's ideas of word-formation. So, though the Committee could not accept this project in every detail, in its final verdict it gave the preference to Esperanto, with the reservation of several changes to be worked out by a small sub-committee "in the direction indicated by the secretaries' report and by the project called Ido, and if possible in agreement with the Esperantist Language Committee."

Some of the leading Esperantists had promised, or half-promised, friendship and cooperation, but after a short time Zamenhof and his nearest friends declared that they would have nothing to do with the Delegation Committee or its language, and so began the fratricidal war which has not yet ended, though it has lost much of its bitterness. Dictionaries and grammars were soon brought out in the new language, which after a good deal of hesitation was baptized with the stupid name of *Ido*; and the monthly publication *Progreso* was devoted to the propagation and constant improvement of that language under the able direction of L. Couturat. Seven big volumes had appeared, when the world war put an end to the periodical, which is a vast storehouse of (partially at any rate) valuable discussions on linguistic questions. Couturat deserves the highest praise for his liberality in opening up the pages of *Progreso* even to articles written in rival languages, less for his furious onslaughts on some Esperantists, though it must be admitted that their methods were not praiseworthy. The death of Couturat just at the beginning of the war was a very severe blow to the cause of the international language.

Some of the most influential men in the Esperanto camp joined the Idists (Ahlberg, Kofman, Lemaire, Schneeberger, to mention only a few of them), and brought with them a not

inconsiderable body of private soldiers, but a still greater number remained under the old colours. The new language, as it was modified through the discussions in *Progreso* till it had become more and more unlike de Beaufront's original project, proved a most flexible and rich language, superior to Esperanto in a great many respects, though, as I shall have occasion to show in the special part, not satisfactory in every point. Its chief fault in my eyes is that its framers did not at the outset take as their motto (with an apology to Dante and to a German comic paper) "Lasciate ogni Esperanto voi ch'entrate," but it must be recognized that the Ido chiefs have nearly all of them shown that they take the word "Progreso" seriously, and are ready to go on even now working at the perfection of the IL without thinking that the last word has already been spoken in that respect. This open-mindedness is seen especially in the "Pasilogio" of Ahlberg's monthly *Mondo*.

The failure of the Committee of 1907 to carry through the programme of producing something which would be accepted by everybody concerned was chiefly due, as it is now easy to see, to two things. In the first place the time was not yet ripe for a final decision: the principles of an interlanguage had not been thrashed out scientifically, and much of the short time at the Committee's disposal had to be spent in clearing away much old rubbish, so that a great many important details had to be left for further discussion in *Progreso*. Secondly, though the Committee comprised some eminently competent members, it was not as a whole authoritative enough in the eyes either of interlinguists or of the world at large; and the same is true of the Ido Academy which was appointed to carry on its work. But in spite of all in spite also of the amount of energy squandered away in the quarrels of Esperantists and Idists the Delegation and the Ido Academy have left their indelible mark on the interlanguage movement, and their influence has been chiefly for the good witness, among other things, the way in which Esperantists have given up several of their compound conundrums in favour of simple internationally known words like *akuzi*, *exkuzi*, *heziti*, etc.

<sup>1</sup> I print here with the permission of Mrs. Sweet, a letter which the late Dr. Sweet sent in 1907 to the Delegation Committee:

DEAR SIR, It seems clear that the ideal way of constructing an a posteriori language would be to make the root-words monosyllabic, and build up the whole vocabulary on them, without any borrowed words; and to make the grammar a priori in spirit as well as form independent of European grammar and parts of speech, no concord, no verbs, etc.

But the result would be inferior to a wholly a priori system, and yet the foundation would be so obscured that the language would not be easily accessible to Europeans; it would not be learnt in a few minutes, like Idiom Neutral.

From this point of view the choice lies between IN and Esperanto. But in their present form they are both so defective from their own point of view that they can only be regarded as a basis. But as IN is, it affords a better basis than Esp because it carries out consistently the principle of the maximum of internationality in the root-words, and because its grammar as well as its vocabulary is a posteriori, and much simpler and less tricky than that of Esp. Esp cannot be reformed: it would fall to pieces.

The spelling of IN is good. Its vocabulary is good; it only wants to get rid of its homonyms, such as *kar*, and its alternative forms, such as *sienti(fi)k*. The grammar should be thoroughly recast on the same principle of the maximum internationality as the vocabulary. The general principles of word-order and syntax generally should be based on English and French the most analytic of European languages whenever they agree. Where they disagree, logical and practical considerations should decide. There would be little difficulty in coming to an agreement on this basis: adjective after noun, accusative shown by position, not by inflection; definite and indefinite articles preserved, but used as in English, etc. A priori elements need not be absolutely excluded. This is what I should do if I were obliged, under pain of death, to furnish a new language within six months.

Yours very truly,

HENRY SWEET.

## Latino sine Flexione

In 1903 the famous Italian mathematician G. Peano started his *Latino sine flexione*. This may be useful to express the abstract truths dealt with in mathematical treatises, but when it is claimed that it can be used also in other sciences and in practical everyday life, the matter is

much more doubtful. The idea is to take the ablative of each Latin noun and one simple form of each verb to be used practically everywhere. This “interlingua” is now employed in the publication of *Academia pro Interlingua*, which purports to be a continuation of the Volapük “Kadem” of 1887; anyone can become a member in consideration of a modest subscription, and members are free to use what dialect they choose of this Latino and there are several, though superficially different writers seem to write the same language. Some use *que* only as a conjunction (“that”), where others say *quod*, some also as a relative and interrogative pronoun and for “than” (*que de melio que libertate?*); *ut* is found for “in order that” and in other writers for “as” (*ut seque, ut normale*); *lege* in one writer means “law,” in another “read,” etc. Some use more or less self-made inflexions (*veniva* preterit, *veniri* future), while Peano himself, who has a curious predilection for etymology, expresses the former tense by a preposed *e* (the Greek augment, which has never existed in Latin), and the latter by a *i* (the Latin root “go”, which has never been used for that purpose in any language), thus *e i* “went,” *i i* “will go” (or perhaps *e ire, i ire*). It makes a curious impression in the midst of this dead speech material to come upon modern words like *utiliza* and *hazarda*: if their number is not greater, this is due to the subjects treated and the necessarily stiff style in which everything is written: there is in this periodical nothing of the freedom and ease of expression found in other recent interlanguages.

Nevertheless the experiment is interesting and has taken the fancy of some scientists who have not entirely forgotten the Latin they were taught at school and who now rejoice to find that they can read most of this Latin without being bothered with irregular verbs and difficult rules of syntax. The facility, however, with which this Latin is read is largely a delusion: for myself, though I have read a good deal of Latin in my life, I have found sentences which I could not make out except by translating them into the mother-tongue of the writer, Italian or French, and others which I was not able to understand even in that way. “*Illo es nunc factus plus facile gratias ad factus*” does that mean “this is now an easier fact,” or “more easily a fact,” or “made easier”? I suppose the last. “*Cresce impossibilitate de resana et illo procedi usque ad securo morte*”; in the next following sentence “*nam Volapük more tunc certo*” I first took *more* to be “custom,” but then discovered that it was Latin *morior*, and that the mark of past time was left out in consequence of the adverb *tunc*, so that the whole meant “V. died certainly.”

This, or rather most of this, may be all very well for those who have learnt Latin, even if they have forgotten most of it; but what about the majority who have never had the benefit of a classical education? It is said that they can understand this Interlingua by means of a Latin dictionary but how are they to know that when they see *more*, they are sometimes to look under *mos*, and sometimes under *morior*? Or where to look for *homine, pote* (“can”), etc.? It is, of course, much worse when it comes to writing (or speaking!) the language oneself: what is the use of telling a man who has learnt no Latin grammar that he is simply to take the ablative, when his dictionary gives him only the nominative and genitive? The interlanguage of the future must necessarily be autonomous and have its own grammar and dictionary: it cannot be dependent on reminiscences of other languages though it may, and must, turn to account the fact that the majority of users have at any rate a smattering of some language or languages besides their own. Peano is quite right in saying that when we say “Two boys came yesterday,” we express both the plural and the time idea twice, and that it would be just as clear to say “Two boy come yesterday,” but this is not the same as saying that a sign for the plural and for past time is generally, or even always, superfluous. Peano’s ideal would be no grammar, or what he thinks is the same thing, the Chinese grammar; but no language can do entirely without grammar, however true it is that the grammar of an interlanguage can be made much simpler than that of our usual languages. Chinese grammar is simplicity itself, in so far as it has no inflexions of the European kind, but it uses other grammatical means, as when *wang* with one tone means “king” and with another tone “to be king,” or when the rules for word-order show whether *ta* is to mean “big,” or “bigness,” not to mention the numerous particles used for grammatical purposes. In imitating the latter feature, and in using word-order to distinguish subject from object we are in perfect agreement with the whole trend of the development of West-European languages.

## After Ido

It is impossible for me in this short survey to name all those who have worked during the last decades at the problem of an interlanguage; let me mention only the following names, chosen perhaps a little arbitrarily: Barral, Borgius, Michaux, Petrashevich, Talmey, Weisbart. Some of them have started from Ido, others have been more or less independent of it; none of them has worked out a language in all details, but none of them is without some good idea here and there some of these have found their way into my own scheme, though in some cases I had come upon the same thought before knowing that it had been anticipated.

A few lines must here be given to M. René de Saussure (“Antido”), who with a rare assiduity and seriousness has combated Couturat's principles of word-formation and at the same time, through shifting and modifying now one, now another ending, produced successively five or six different “languages,” which might easily be mistaken for caricatures of Esperanto, if their author had not seized every opportunity of expressing his deep veneration for Zamenhof's genius.

## Occidental

A little more space must be given to E. de Wahl, who had for many years given much thought to the problem, which he had followed through all the phases of Volapük, Esperanto, Idiom Neutral, Reform-Neutral, Ido, before bringing out his own *Occidental* in 1922. The name indicates his principal idea: he wants to make a language for use in the Occidental world with no immediate thought of catering for the people of the Orient, and he therefore bases his scheme on the Occidental languages, chiefly the Romanic ones. This of course is what most recent interlinguists have done, though perhaps not so consistently and consciously as de Wahl; but what is in his own eyes the chief merit of Occidental, is the way in which the formation of words has been built up on the actual use of suffixes, etc., used in the existing modern languages. It forms in that respect a continuation of Neutral and especially of Rosenberger's Reform-Neutral, but is based on more thorough study. He thus does away with the arbitrary word elements of the other languages, but in his pronounced endeavour to have “natural” forms he is obliged largely to abandon ease and regularity of formation, admitting in many cases two root-forms for the same word to be used in different derivatives, e.g. *vid* “see”, *vis-ion*; *curr* “run”, *curs-iv*. It is true that in this way he obtains not a few words which when framed according to his rules agree with the forms actually found in many languages; but in spite of the rules being more complicated than is usual in a constructed language he does not in every case obtain perfect agreement with the forms in national languages; in a few pages I find, for instance, the following words: *scrition*, *analysation*, *interprension* (enterprise), *descovrition*, which have no equivalents in existing languages. (Other examples will be mentioned in the special part.) The countless irregularities in the word-formation of national languages make it impossible to follow them through thick and thin in a language whose *raison d'être* should be that it is essentially easier than existing languages: perfect regularity and perfect naturalness cannot possibly be combined, we must compromise here and there, but as I hope to show in Part II, it is possible to much more natural forms than those of Ido, and yet at the same time a much greater regularity than is found in Occidental. Through regularity of word-formation we take into consideration the interests of those who know only their own language but I am afraid that when Occidental is praised as very easy, it is chiefly by people who are already familiar with two or three of the great European languages.

## Conclusions

The history of the Interlanguage Movement should not deal exclusively with the various systems proposed up till now, but should also take into account all those believers in an auxiliary language who have not been willing to enlist in one or the other camp or who, though making practical use of either Esperanto or Ido or Occidental, have yet a strong feeling that the last word has not been said in the question of the final shape of the Interlanguage. Various attempts have been made of recent years by non-partisan interlinguists to have the question referred to some impartial competent committee selected by some authoritative body the

League of Nations or its “Commission de Coopération Intellectuelle,” or the “Union Académique Internationale,” or the “International Research Council.” So far all such attempts have failed, but it seems as if the movement has grown stronger after each rebuff, which has thus proved only a postponement of something that is certain to come when the first indifference of international statesmen and scholars has worn off. An important sign of the times in this direction is the recent foundation of the *International Auxiliary Language Association* of America (I.A.L.A.), which has already in its brief life through its impartial propaganda for the idea, through various pedagogical experiments, and through the bringing about of gatherings of adherents of different systems, contributed very considerably towards the creation of that general interest and mutual good will without which the Interlanguage Movement cannot hope for a final victory. It is now time to point the moral. The history of all these various attempts, as I read it, teaches us the following lessons:

(1) There is a real need for a constructed interlanguage: after each failure of one scheme others will crop up, and that will continue until a satisfactory solution has been found.

(2) A language may have a temporary vogue, but if it has obvious defects, criticism will sooner or later lead to schisms and new and better systems, as was the case with Volapük, with Esperanto, with Idiom Neutral, and now with Ido. The scientific and political world will not accept a language that can be justly and severely criticized by competent authorities.

(3) Only those schemes have had a considerable number of adherents which were worked out in sufficient detail and completeness to allow of their being used for the most various purposes.

(4) When details in proposed interlanguages are criticized, it is nearly always because they are unnatural, i.e. deviate more than necessary from what is found in existing languages or what is already international in these, or else because they are unnecessarily complicated in their grammatical structure or incapable of expressing ideas with a sufficient degree of precision. These, then, are the things to be avoided in a future interlanguage.

*The less arbitrary and the more rational the forms, the more stable will they be.*

(5) All recent attempts show an unmistakable family likeness, and may be termed dialects of one and the same type of international language. This shows that just as bicycles and typewriters are now nearly all of the same type, which was not the case with the early makes, we are now in the matter of interlanguage approaching the time when one standard type can be fixed authoritatively in such a way that the general structure will remain stable, though new words will, of course, be constantly added when need requires.

These considerations, and especially the conviction that the technique of language construction has reached a high degree of perfection, have emboldened me to present the new scheme for an international auxiliary language which will form the subject of the second part of this book. As such a scheme must have a name, I have called it

NOVIAL = Nov (new) I.A.L.,

where I.A.L. stands for International Auxiliary Language. The principles which have guided me will appear partly from what I have said already, partly from the detailed discussion in Part II. I must here specially mention the formula I put forward in 1908, and which since then has been very often quoted by Idists:

*That international language is best which in every point offers the greatest facility to the greatest number* (modelled, of course, on Hutcheson's and Bentham's famous dictum: That action is best which accomplishes the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers).

This does not mean, as some would have it, that we should take Chinese as our interlanguage, because that language is known to the greatest number of men: for while written ideographic Chinese is the same all over China (though only partly known to most Chinese), the same is not true of spoken Chinese, which lives in several varieties. Besides, Chinese with its tone system would offer unsurmountable difficulties to everybody else. But I cannot object to my formula being taken to refer only to Europeans and those inhabitants of the other continents who are either of European extraction or whose culture is based on European civilization. If the



principle is understood in this way I think it will prove a safe guide in most cases, though it is evident that it is impossible mathematically to calculate the comparative ease of different forms, except with regard to parts of the vocabulary.

It is, however, very important to remember that the facility of which we speak here is not merely the superficial facility, with which a printed message can be understood at first sight that is something, but not everything. For an interlanguage to be really useful it must be easy not only to the reader, but also to the intending writer and speaker, and this implies a good deal more. An irregularly formed word may be extremely easy of comprehension to anyone who has it in his own language or who knows it from another language with which he happens to be familiar, but it may at the same time be very difficult to anybody else, much more difficult than a regular formation employing a suffix he has learnt once for all and which can be applied to a number of words. Our principle thus makes for the greatest possible regularity though one or two small exceptions, if well motivated and easily remembered, should not alarm us: as a matter of fact, not a single constructed language is totally exempt from exceptions, not even Esperanto, in spite of the boastings of its adherents.<sup>1</sup> An interlanguage can thus be made many times more easy than any of the national languages. The latter may be compared to old picturesque towns with irregularly winding streets having unsystematic names, while interlanguages are like American cities, whose streets are straight lines intersecting one another at right angles and are numbered instead of named. Or we may say that while a national language is like a stroll between trees on small footpaths, an interlanguage is like rushing along in a railway carriage or motor-car on a good straight broad road. In the latter case one gets rapidly along and reaches tracts that are beyond the reach of the pedestrian, but one cannot enjoy all the delicate shades of beauty which a leisurely walk will reveal to one, and it is impossible to acquire the same intimate familiarity that is to be obtained by repeated strolls. Each method of locomotion has its advantages, and nothing hinders us from combining both. In the same way an interlanguage will never make national languages superfluous, and can never afford the delight felt by all serious students of foreign languages not to mention the fact that the study of one of these opens up access to that part of its literature which cannot be fully enjoyed in translations. In comparing the value of the two kinds of language study we should thus take into consideration first that one of them requires say ten or twenty times as long a time as the other, secondly that the one gives access to more valuable literature and to the whole national life of a foreign country, but that on the other hand the other puts one in contact with inhabitants of several countries at once. The advantages of the study of the interlanguage will of course be multiplied many times over, when it has spread much more than at present, when, consequently, much valuable scientific and general literature is translated into it, and will be even greater when the interlanguage is taught everywhere as “the second language to everybody.”

But that, the reader will say, is a far-off dream. Quite so, but then, as Lowell says, “most of the best things we now possess began by being dreams.”

<sup>1</sup> *La* is not inflected in case and number, like the other adjuncts in *-a*. Not every adverb ends in *-e*; and *-au*, which evidently was meant as a kind of prepositional ending, is used very unsystematically. The genitive in *-s* (*kies*) is found only very sparingly and forms an exception to the usual manner of expressing the genitive relation. When *multe da* or *kelke da* is used, no sign for the accusative can be added.