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Publication date

2016

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Perspectives of language communication in the EU

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Citation for published version (APA):

Gobbo, F. (2016). Approaches to multilingualism of Esperanto speakers. In D. Tekeliová (Ed.), *Perspectives of language communication in the EU* (pp. 69-80). Costantine the Philosopher University in Nitra - Faculty of Central European Studies.

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Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra
Faculty of Central European Studies



**PERSPECTIVES OF LANGUAGE COMMUNICATION
IN THE EU**



Nitra 2016

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APPROACHES TO MULTILINGUALISM OF ESPERANTO SPEAKERS¹

Federico Gobbo

Abstract: Since the 1990s, the Esperanto Movement has been forced to rethink about its own place in a fast-changing world, where English definitely becomes the dominant language on a global level. The Manifesto, signed in Prague in 1996, set the new ideological horizon. This paper investigates what has become commonsensical of the Prague Manifesto within the Esperanto community after twenty years, on the basis of a sociolinguistic research conducted in 2014 on how Esperanto speakers approach multilingualism.

Keywords: *multilingualism, Esperanto, Prague Manifesto, democracy*

1 INTRODUCTION

It is generally acknowledged by scholars and the general public that Esperanto is the most successful planned language in the whole history of humankind – for an introduction in English of the phenomenon of planned languages, see at least [1]. In fact, unlike several other proposals of languages planned for international communication, only Esperanto succeeded to survive two World Wars, in spite of the explicit persecutions by Hitler and Stalin [2], being spoken uninterruptedly by an international community at least since the first World Esperanto Congress held in Boulogne-sur-Mer (France) in 1905. That major event in the Esperanto history took almost twenty years of preparation. In fact, Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof, the launcher of Esperanto, published the first book of his *lingvo internacia*, i.e. international language, already in 1887. He worked hard to form a community of speakers that eventually called themselves Esperantists, and the language itself Esperanto – for an introduction on Zamenhof's life and work, see [3]. In order to do so, the language could not work only as a mean of communication – as Esperanto is generally intended outside the Esperanto community – but also as an identity marker. For instance, Zamenhof and the pioneers of the Esperanto Movement felt the need of preparing a whole set of symbols around the language.

There are two major Esperanto symbols that are worth to mention. The first one is the pseudo-national anthem – called *antemo* by the pioneers, and *himno* in contemporary Esperanto, while the second one is the green flag, called *verda standardo* by the pioneers, and *Esperanto-flago* or *verda flago* in contemporary Esperanto. Inside the *flago*, you can find a green star, called *insigno de Esperanto* by the pioneers and *verda stelo* in contemporary Esperanto. Green stars can be easily found as earrings or car stickers among the participants of World Congresses – in Esperanto, *Universalaj Kongresoj*. The *verda flago* is still in use, even if alternative symbols were proposed in order to “modernize” the look and feel of Esperanto during its history, notably the *jubilea simbolo* proposed in 1987, exactly one century after the launch of the language. Also the *himno* is still well known. In fact, Esperantists sing it together during the official opening and closing of all World Esperanto Congresses, since the first one until the last one, the 101st World

¹ This paper has received funding from the European Community's Seventh Framework Programme under grant agreement No. 613344 (Project MIME).

Congress, held in Nitra in 2016, during the same days of this conference. The text of the *himno* is known by every Esperantist, and it traces the original ideology of Esperanto as felt by its pioneers, namely an ideology of peace and brotherhood among the nations: instead of making war, different peoples meet as if they were brothers, members of one only great family circle, *unu granda rondo familia*, as stated in the *himno* itself.

This fundamental ideology of peace is still shared by the majority of Esperantists, but it was declined in different ways according to the times and places where Esperanto happened to be spread. The first internal Esperanto Movement was formed by Christian Esperantists, Esperanto, for whom the language is a crucial tool to reunite the Christian Churches [4]. For example, after the First World War, there was a strong left-winged Esperanto Movement that wanted Esperanto to be the “Latin of the proletarians”, following the idea that the goals of the working class is the same regardless of the national boundaries that artificially block them [5]. These two examples show that Esperanto is not only a language, but a much more complex phenomenon, with its own ideology (such as the *himno*, *flago*, *stelo*) and internal dynamics, such as the Christian movement and the left-winged one.

A whole treatment of the different facets of the ideology of Esperanto is outside the scope of this paper; what is interesting for us here is that Zamenhof's creation and the following development is the only focus of attention shared by all esperantists, and this fact leaves open space for ideological reasoning around the language. Following the model of the Babelic myth, multilingualism is considered a curse of humanity and – in this perspective – Esperanto is the solution. For Zamenhof, Esperanto should solve the international communication and act as a barrier to chauvinism, while patriotism is tolerated [3]. In its most extreme form – called *sennaciismo*, lit. 'anationalism' – all national languages should be replaced by Esperanto in the long term, when the proletarians will have performed their world-wide revolution [5]. This ideology was shared by a part of the left-winged esperantists in the 1920s and the 1930s, but after the Second World War it was considered passé.

Pietiläinen [6] analyses the ideological change within the Esperanto community occurred in the aftermath of the Second World War, where major ideological changes occurred, mainly expressed through the redaction of public declarations and manifestos. Traditionally, the Esperanto Movement put less attention on the attitudes of Esperanto speakers towards the *other* languages they speak. It is worth noting that monolingual Esperanto speakers simply never existed, as they are immersed in other language communities during the most part of the year. In other words, every Esperanto speaker is at least bilingual, and they are often plurilingual. In 1969, TEJO, the world-wide Esperanto association of young Esperantists, published a Declaration in Tyresö, Sweden, in which it is stated that esperantists cannot accept any form of language and cultural discrimination, and in particular the endangerment of the existence of entire populations, which is “nothing else than an instrument of linguistic imperialism” (quoted in [6], my translation). Esperanto is there perceived as the only language that does not impose itself on the others. According to this multilingualism is seen in a positive light, no more as a Babelic curse.

At the same time, the role of English as the favourite language for international communication – outside USSR and the countries politically linked to it – grew more and more. The new generation of young esperantists seemed to accept this fact, envisioning a different role for Esperanto. A manifesto was signed in Rauma, Finland, in 1980, where it is stated that “the falling of English is neither a task nor a concern of esperantists: after all, English plays the role only as auxiliary language, similarly to French in its times (...)

Zamenhof never proposed to the Esperanto Movement as a goal to confront French, because for Esperanto he foresaw a more important alternative role” (quoted in [6], my translation). Unlike the Declaration in Tyresö, the Rauma Manifesto emphasised the role of Esperanto as a self-standing *Kultursprache*, defining “the essence of esperantism as if it were the belonging to a self-chosen diasporic language minority” (quoted in [6], my translation). This passage is the most discussed and contested ideological stand within the Esperanto community since its publication. The conceptual frame is that esperantists are like Jews in diaspora, therefore they are on the same footing of members of language minorities. I already argued elsewhere that proper language minorities are framed as such only in relation to a majority: their members normally live in a territory where their language is not considered prestigious, and therefore the bilingualism with the majority language can threaten their language. This profile simply does not apply to the situation of Esperanto speakers: the fact that Esperantoland – *Esperantujo* in the language – does not exist on the map but only in the heart of esperantists does not imply that they were thrown out of their ancestral territory, as Jews in the diaspora were. For these reasons, the definition of “diasporic language minority” does not fit the sociolinguistic reality of Esperanto. The situation of the Esperanto community is of a community of practice [7], i.e. a social group not defined by shared social characteristics, like social class, gender, ethnic origin, neighbourhood and ways of living – like speech community often do – but only by the regular joint activity and its reflection over it, that in this case is Esperanto, but it could be chess play or cat loving.

It is worth noting that the Esperanto word *raŭmismo* – lit. the ideology of the Rauma Manifesto – during the decades drifted towards a generic emphasis on the self-evolution of the Esperanto culture. In the common sense of Esperanto speakers – as shown below by the data of the sociolinguistic research – the *raŭmismo* was put in contrast to the traditional ideology, often referred in Esperanto as *finvenkismo*, lit. ideology of the Final Victory, i.e. when Esperanto will be everybody's second language, in the pioneers' hope. In fact, according to the general perception by esperantists, the traditional ideology put the emphasis on the struggles to make Esperanto recognized by supra-national institutions, like the League of the Nations, then the UN, Unesco or the EU, over the development of the Esperanto culture. Both terms are somehow simplistic. Recently, they were put together in another declaration – unfortunately far less known than the previous documents signed in the Nordic countries. In 2012, in Hanoi, Vietnam, the young esperantists of the last generation wrote: “Friendship, Brotherhood and Love are the basic values of the Esperanto Movement, which play the major role in the international Esperanto meetings. The international young Esperanto Movement can be proud of it (...) Within the young movement it is normal to work both for development and reinforcement of the Esperanto community and culture as well as for the spreading of the neutrally human international language (*lingvo internacia, neŭtrale homa*, which is Zamenhof's wording). We believe that [our] action can be more completely and widely defined as 'raumistic' and traditional together (*raŭmismo finvenkismo*, in the original, my translation)”.

However, another influential ideological document was produced by the Esperanto Movement before 2012: it is the manifesto signed in the 81st World Congress in Prague, in 1996. The Prague Manifesto acted as a visit card of the Esperanto community towards the outside world for the last two decades. In the next section 2, the Prague Manifesto will be analysed in detail. Then, section 3 presents the results of a sociolinguistic research that illustrates the attitudes of Esperanto speakers towards multilingualism: the aim is to verify

how much the Prague Manifesto became commonsensical among esperantists in the last twenty years. Finally, some concluding reflections will be offered for further research.

2 ANALYSIS OF THE PRAGUE MANIFESTO

In 1996 the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the USSR were still a fresh memory. For decades, one of the main roles of the Esperanto Movement have been acting a bridge through the Iron Curtain in Europe and in the world. That role ceased to be actual; moreover, there was a sense of urgency in reconciling the different instances formulated in Tyresö before and then in Rauma. In Prague, they found a new original synthesis. The text of the Prague Manifesto is made by a preamble and seven “principles” and seven “objectives” in parallel. Each principle is clarified with a text in plain, while the objectives of the Esperanto Movement are illustrated in italics immediately thereafter. The text quoted here below is the official English translation from the Esperanto original. This is the opening sentence of the Manifesto:

We, members of the worldwide movement for the promotion of Esperanto, address this manifesto to all governments, international organizations and people of good will; declare our unshakable commitment to the objectives set out here; and invite each and every organization and individual to join us in our effort.

Unlike all other ideological documents mentioned above, that Manifesto was quickly translated in major languages of the world and explicitly directed towards the outside world. The preamble presents a definition of the Esperanto language and its phenomenon.

Launched in 1887 as a project for an auxiliary language for international communication and quickly developed into a rich living language in its own right, Esperanto has worked for more than a century to connect people across language and culture barriers. Meanwhile, the objectives of its speakers have not lost importance or relevance. Neither the worldwide use of a few national languages, nor advances in communications technology, nor the development of new methods of language instruction will likely realize the following principles, which we consider essential for just and effective language order.

The preamble explains why Esperanto is still needed, in spite of the spread of English, the advancement in machine translation technologies and the possibilities of language learning that were starting to appear thanks to the new technology of the World Wide Web (at that time!). I want to underline the two adjectives used here for the Esperanto language order view of the world: “just” and “effective”. The first adjective refers to concepts like justice and democracy – in general: the ethical domain – while the second one refers to the economic domain. I will analyse the seven principles in the original order.

1. Democracy. A communication system which privileges some people but requires of others that they invest years of effort in order to attain a lesser degree of competency is fundamentally undemocratic. Although, like any language, Esperanto is not perfect, it greatly exceeds all rivals in the sphere of equitable global

communication.

We assert that language inequality entails inequality of communication at all levels, including the international level. We are a movement for democratic communication.

The main argument here is that Esperanto is the best tool for democratic communication we have at our disposal. While a native speaker of English, for example, should not spend years in acquiring fluency in English, while that is the situation of any learner of English as a second language. It is worth noting that the first principle does not mention English explicitly, as the situation is the same with French, Spanish, Chinese or any other powerful language. This does not happen in the case of Esperanto, as in theory every learner of the language is on an equal footing. I say 'in theory', echoing the fact that Esperanto “is not perfect”, because clearly speakers of Indo-European languages has an advantage on the others. In fact the lexicon is mainly borrowed from French, Latin and Romance languages in general, with a consistent part of Germanic roots too – mainly from German and English, but also Yiddish – while a tiny part is Slavic (from Russian and Polish) and from Classic Greek – for a detailed corpus-based analysis of the language, see Gledhill 2000. In other words, a prototypical Chinese, Japanese, Swahili or Finnish monolingual speaker should learn almost all the lexicon from scratch, while a monolingual French will have a good degree of familiarity with more than half of the lexicon essentially for free.

There is another assumption under the assertion of Esperanto as a 'democratic language': while native speakers of language A has got a clear advantage if A is a powerful language, no Esperanto speaker has got this privilege. This is not entirely true: Esperanto as a family language is a well known phenomenon, so it can be argued that a tiny fraction of the Esperanto speakers will have an advantage on the others – 1% circa of the actual Esperantophony is spoken in the family (on this phenomenon – on this aspect, see at least [8], [9] and [10]. However, Esperanto family speakers cannot be really considered native speakers of it, like the prototypical monolingual speaker of strong languages like English or Chinese, mainly for two reasons. First, there are no monolingual Esperanto speakers – as stated in principle 5, “Multilingualism” (see discussion below). Second, Esperanto family speakers do not have any particular status in terms of prestige and authority on the language compared to Esperanto fluent speakers who learnt it outside the family. In other words, they do not form a distinct group that 'owns' the language: for example, if a non native of German has a doubt in a specific wording, s/he will probably turn to a native German speaker for advice; this simply does not happen in the case of Esperanto.

2. Transnational Education. Any ethnic language is linked to a certain culture and nation or group of nations. For example, the student who studies English learns about the culture, geography and politics of the English-speaking world, primary the United States and United Kingdom. The student who studies Esperanto learns about a world without limits, in which every country is like a home.

We assert that the education of any ethnic language is linked to a specific worldview. We are a movement for transnational education.

The second principle introduces a topic which is strongly linked to the Esperanto culture. First, it appears the expression “ethnic language”, which in plain English is synonymous of “natural language”. However, in the Esperanto perspective, it is pejorative to call Esperanto 'artificial' in contrast to natural languages; Esperanto being the central

point of reference, natural languages are “ethnic” because they are culturally linked to an *ethnos* – e.g., the Greek, Dutch, or Arabs – while Esperanto is unlinked to any ethnic group. On the contrary, Esperanto is linked to an *ethos*, which is described programmatically in the seven principles of the Prague Manifesto. This fact is reflected into education: in any book for Italian as a second language, learners will be introduced to the Colosseo in Rome or the history of Venice. In learning Esperanto, there is no special culture of reference, unless the Esperanto culture itself, which is truly cosmopolitan. However, Mark Fettes stated in the 100th World Congress in Lille, France, Esperanto has no special territory nonetheless it has its own geography: every member of the Esperanto community is familiar with the towns of Białystok (Poland) and Boulogne-sur-Mer (France), because they are respectively Zamenhof’s birthplace and the town where the first World Congress had place. Therefore, there is a specific Esperanto worldview, which is constantly (re)shaped by the members of the Esperanto community throughout its use.

3. Pedagogical Efficiency. Only a small percentage of those who study a foreign language begin to master it. Full understanding of Esperanto is achievable within a month of study. Various studies have ascribed propaedeutic effects to the study of other languages. One also recommends Esperanto as a core element in courses for the linguistic sensitization of students.

We assert that the difficulty of the ethnic languages always will present obstacles to many students, who nevertheless would profit from the knowledge of a second language. We are a movement for effective language instruction.

The third principle is perhaps the most delicate. It is certainly true that learning Esperanto was tested several times to act a facilitator in learning other languages, mainly in primary schools – the so-called “propaedeutic effect”. On the other hand, it is also true that that positive effect was tested only in learning European languages, and in particular English and French – for a recent survey and critical analysis of the literature, see [11]. It should be said that the “propaedeutic effect” seems to be limited within the boundaries of the language upon which Esperanto was planned. However, several scholars who analysed Esperanto argue that the *structure* of the language is not Indo-European, showing similarities with languages like Hungarian, Turkish, or even Vietnamese and Chinese – for instance, among the others [12] and [13]. Therefore, the measure of “one month of study” for “full understanding” of the language is an oversimplification: too many factors are involved, namely the linguistic repertoire of the learner and his/her motivation (internal factors), the prestige of the language in the learner’s society and the actual presence of learning materials (external factors). However, anecdotal evidence shows that Esperanto speakers consider the language “easy” because of its extremely regularity in the morphology.

4. Multilingualism. The Esperanto community is one of the few worldwide linguistic communities whose members are, without exception, bi- or multilingual. Each member of the community accepted the task of learning at least one foreign language

to a communicative degree. In multiple cases this leads to the knowledge and love of several languages and generally to broader personal horizons.

We assert that the speakers of all languages, large and small, should have a real opportunity to learn a second language to a high communicative level. We are a movement for the provision of that opportunity.

In my opinion, this principle is badly written compared to the others, as the perspective is completely reversed: in fact, the “one foreign language” mentioned in the text is nothing else than Esperanto itself! And the term is somehow misleading: as the sociolinguistic research show, Esperanto speakers mostly do not consider the language “foreign”, as they feel quite comfortable in using it, even if they are not completely fluent.

5. Linguistic Rights. The unequal distribution of power between languages is a recipe for permanent language insecurity, or straightforward linguistic suppression, in a large part of the world’s population. In the Esperanto community, the speakers of a language, large or small, official or nonofficial, meet on neutral terms, thanks to a reciprocated will to compromise. This equilibrium between linguistic rights and responsibilities provides a precedent for developing and evaluating other solutions to language inequalities and conflict.

We assert that the vast variations in power among languages undermines the guarantees, expressed in so many international documents, of equal treatment without discrimination of languages. We are a movement for linguistic rights.

The notion of “Linguistic Rights” is already established in the literature, and referred to as a widely known notion, being “expressed in so many international documents”. In 1954 the General Conference of UNESCO acknowledged that the achievements of Esperanto match its ideals Universal Esperanto Association (UEA) and, following that, UEA had obtained official relationships with the United Nations, permitted to introduce Esperanto in the discourse around linguistic rights in the following decades of collaboration.

6. Linguistic Diversity. The national governments tend to consider the grand diversification of world languages as barriers to communication and development. For the Esperanto community, however, linguistic diversity is a constant and indispensable source of enrichment. Therefore, every language, like every living thing, is inherently valuable and worthy of protection and support.

We assert that policies of communication and development, if not based on respect and support for all languages, condemn to extinction the majority of the world’s languages. We are a movement for linguistic diversity.

Principle 6 follows principle 5 as the main tenet in supporting linguistic rights. In fact, without the recognition of linguistic diversity as a value per se, the whole discourse of linguistic rights is hardly acceptable.

7. Human Emancipation. Every language liberates and imprisons its speakers, giving them the power to communicate among themselves while barring them from communication with others. Planned as a universal communications tool, Esperanto is one of the largest functioning projects of human emancipation or projects to enable

every human to participate as an individual in the human community, with secure roots in their local culture and linguistic identity, while not being limited by it.

We assert that the exclusive use of national languages inevitably raises barriers to the freedoms of expression, communication, and association. We are a movement for human emancipation.

The final principle has its roots in the Zamenhof's humanistic philosophy: for him, Esperanto was mainly a tool to permit the communication among human beings regardless of their ethnic identity, a sort of antidote to chauvinism and aggressive nationalism – see the biography of [3]. In this sense, the Prague Manifesto reprises the ultimate goal of Esperanto, the “human emancipation”, that was crucial for the Esperanto founder. After the analysis, it is clear that the Prague Manifesto puts much more emphasis on the ethical domain (the “just” side) over the economical one (the “effective” side). In fact, on the seven “principles” only the third one, “Pedagogical Efficiency”, describes how Esperanto is efficient and therefore economic – with all the limits already addressed. In other words, according to the Prague Manifesto, the choice of learning Esperanto and being part of its community of practice seems to be driven more by ethical considerations than economic ones. This hypothesis will be scrutinized in the next section using sociolinguistic data.

3 ESPERANTO SPEAKERS AND MULTILINGUALISM

In the scholarly literature about the Esperanto phenomenon, sociolinguistic enquiries are still rare. Perhaps the most important study is by Peter Forster, who focused on the British Esperanto Movement, but it was more than thirty years ago [14]. As explained in the Introduction, the situation changed a lot in that period, so a new study was needed. In 2014, a new study was performed by Irene Caligaris, by that time an MA student in language science at the University of Torino, under the supervision of the author. In 2015, the MA thesis that was resulted from that fieldwork research was awarded with the Giorgio Canuto and Ivo Lapenna Prizes for the best thesis in interlinguistics and eventually it became a research book [15]. In this section I will illustrate the main results of that study in relation to the seven principles of the Prague Manifesto analysed before. The goal is to verify at what extent the Prague Manifesto became commonsensical among esperantists.

In 2014 in Italy there were two international Esperanto meetings: the *Internacia Junulara Festivalo*, International Youth Festival, at Castelsardo (Sardinia, Italy) and the *Itala Kongreso de Esperanto*, Italian Congress of Esperanto at Fai della Paganella (Trento, Italy). The fieldwork was conducted in both meetings: the first one is normally directed to young Esperanto speakers², while the second one has no age specification.

On approximately 120 participants of the meeting in Castelsardo, only a half of them really took part to the activities with regularity, and 28 accepted to participate to the sociolinguistic research. On approximately 200 participants of the Italian Congress of Esperanto, 65 participated: in total, 93 informants.³ The methodology followed in both

surveys – which were almost identical⁴ – was blended, i.e., quantitative and qualitative. The informants were asked to fill a questionnaire of 44 questions about their attitude towards languages. Some questions were open (i.e., they have some space to write down their answers) while others were closed. It is important to note that each questionnaire was filled with the researcher in situ, and the informant was allowed to ask clarifying questions to the researcher. There was no group dynamics; in other words, each informant had a personal time with the researcher. In some cases, the questionnaire revealed to be compelling, and more than an hour was needed for the filling; however, in general the informants were happy to help the researcher in her enquiry.

It is important to note that, although both meetings are held in Italy, the majority of the participants come from other countries. However, the overall majority of the participants to this sociolinguistic research came from European countries. Interestingly, nobody indicated English as his or her mother tongue, while some indicated Esperanto as one of their mother tongues. It should be noted that in a world-wide perspective the presence of the esperantists in the Far East cannot be neglected (most notably in China, South Korea and Japan). Therefore, the results of this study should be checked with another statistic sample including Asian Esperanto speakers, and the following observations should be regarded as a research hypothesis only.

In general, the informants tend to overestimate their knowledge of foreign languages (and sometimes, to forget to include Esperanto, as if it were not foreign at all). In fact, after the self-evaluation of one's linguistic repertoire, the actual use of the languages in real (and virtual) life is quite reduced: English is used and perceived as the “business language”, while Esperanto is the *lingvo de amikeco* (language of friendship). It is worth noting that quite often there were mentioned both classic languages (such as Latin, Ancient Greek or even Sanskrit and Biblical Hebrew) and minority languages, such as Catalan or Sardinian, sometimes as second languages – interestingly, sometimes Esperanto itself is considered a minority language. Multilingualism (principle 4 of the Prague Manifesto) is considered a positive value per se by the overall majority of the interviewees. Also the concept of linguistic rights (principle 5) is considered an important shared value for the Esperanto Movement, as well as linguistic diversity (principle 6). Sometimes Esperanto is perceived as a “shield” for weak languages like minority ones, sometimes it plays no role at all. This uncertainty implies that esperantists still lack a clear view on how language inequality hinders democracy (principle 1). Another shared trait is that the culture of respect and openness of the Esperanto community is seen as a viable vehicle for human emancipation (principle 7). The idea of transnational education (principle 2) is important only for esperantists who are professionally language teachers (sometimes retired) or in some way involved in education. Although this professional category is important among Esperanto speakers, they are a minority in the community. For several interviewees, the general education system is highly inefficient (as principle 3 in the Prague Manifesto acknowledges) but it is considered a “necessary evil”.

I argue that the “efficient” side of the Prague Manifesto, already underestimated in the text itself, is not part of the common sense of the Esperanto community nowadays, while the “ethical” side, in particular the positive value of multilingualism, linguistic diversity and linguistic rights are parts of the standard knowledge of the average Esperanto speaker,

² In the Esperanto culture, according to TEJO “young” means people until 30 years of age, but there is a current discussion about changing this age limit to 35.

³ The ANOVA analysis of the two samples show that the age variable is meaningful to discriminate the two samples [for details see: 15, p. 444, note 1].

⁴ The wording of a couple of questions between the two meetings was changed so to avoid possible ambiguities.

and therefore they influence their ideology, at least in respect to languages and multilingualism.

4 CONCLUSION

Esperanto speakers feel that learning the language fosters plurilingualism, i.e. the mastery of other languages different from Esperanto and their mother tongue(s), and in general Zamenhof's creation plays a different role in their cognitive mapping of their repertoire. In other words, Esperanto is neither considered foreign, nor native – with the important exception of family speakers. Sometimes, Esperanto is learnt in the family for peculiar reason: in the World Congress in Nitra, I had a conversation with a young speaker who learnt it so to have a *secret* language with her mother (who studied the language many years before, but did not use it for decades) in contrast with her father and sister. Notably, her father's mother tongue and her mother's are different, so both sisters were already raised bilingually. This anecdote shows that the motivations in approaching Esperanto can be very different, according to the variety of life situations of its speakers. On the other hand, there is no agreement on a precise strategy fostering multilingualism, i.e. mastery of many languages in the society. The only shared view is that multilingualism as such is a positive thing and should be generically promoted. Esperanto intertwines with the other languages in a lot of ways still unexplored and worth further investigation.

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6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author is appointed as holder of the Special Chair in Interlinguistics and Esperanto at the University of Amsterdam on behalf of Universal Esperanto Association (UEA). The content and opinions expressed here are the author's ones and they do not necessarily reflect the opinions of UEA.

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