

## Our Language

### Why language-users identify with a language : the case of Esperanto

*Wim Jansen*

**Note:** text of the Buchanan lecture, delivered by the author at the University of Liverpool on November 19th, 2009. Reformatted for publication on [esperantoresearch.org.uk](http://esperantoresearch.org.uk) > [esperantology](http://esperantology.org).

## 1. Introduction

In reply to your kind invitation to come to Liverpool and deliver this year's Buchanan lecture I found myself obliged to prepare this in a language which, in Otto Jespersen's famous words, allows me to say what I can, but not necessarily what I want. The sounds you will hear may resemble the sounds of English, but they aren't; they are best-effort imitations produced by a foreigner whose native setting of his speech organs is very un-English. The intonation you will pick up may approach that of English, but will reveal glitches which mark the speaker as a foreigner. Here and there the build-up of my sentences will have left a word in the wrong position. And if you had a chance to go through my script, you might discover spelling mistakes and commas missing or in the wrong place. This English approaches yours, but does not pretend to be yours. It is also known as English as a Lingua Franca or ELF, in the personal variety I've used all over the world for many years to carry out complex engineering projects, a kind of English without British or American post-editing, commonly accepted as such not because it was correct, but simply because it was there. Today, however, I am facing a public of mostly or exclusively native speakers, and this circumstance makes it more awkward for me. Subconsciously you will apply your native standards to judge the correctness or even plausibility of what I say. Those native standards are not the same as the looser ELF standards I am used to. Despite this proviso I sincerely hope you will continue to bear with me on the issues I am about to develop and that you will concentrate on the conceptual contents even if occasionally the form they are proposed in does not fully conform to your expectations. I am, indeed, greatly honoured by your kind invitation to speak for you today and do hope you won't be disappointed.

At the beginning of the nineties Umberto Eco, visiting professor at the 'Collège de France' in Paris, gave a series of lectures on the historical search for a perfect language. In those lectures Esperanto, the project published by Zamenhof in 1887, received an apparently positive treatment. In 1993 Eco's research was published in book form under the title *The Search for the Perfect Language in the European Culture* (Eco 1993). Once again, this time in his conclusive chapter dedicated to Esperanto, Eco spent a few friendly words on this language. Their reception in the Esperanto press was jubilant, though entirely uncritical. During this process Eco was extensively interviewed, the original Italian version of his work was translated into Esperanto and the ensuing review of the book was full of praise (Minnaja 1996). Then – it was over. Eco disappeared from the pages of the most authoritative monthly magazine *Esperanto*, which is read in 120 countries worldwide, and until today there have been no signs of an imminent comeback.

If Esperanto has lost its appeal to Eco, what appeal might this perfect language example of his still have for the two pillars which support my chair of interlinguistics and Esperanto at the University of Amsterdam, devoted to the science of constructed languages in general and Esperanto in particular? I will not dwell on the theoretical question as to how I would define the concept of 'perfection', let alone how I might want to measure the level of perfection which a language may have reached. When I use the word 'perfection' I mean something like 'meeting the requirements of the user to his or her full satisfaction', no matter how open to subjective interpretations this purely practical definition may be. Whoever troubles to read Zamenhof's 1887 brochure with care, will soon come to the conclusion that the word 'perfection' is not mentioned among the requirements Zamenhof set out for the language he intended to design. The project that emerged from his undertaking aimed at bringing together the following three features: 1. a high level of

internationality; 2. immediate applicability; 3. easy learnability. Not a word was spent on perfection as a possible design driver (Zamenhof 2007/1887: 7-8). Neither the science community nor the public at large was well served by professor Eco's inclusion of Esperanto in a search for a perfection ideal Zamenhof was not remotely interested in. In his brochure Zamenhof writes that the project he is offering to the public seems to him 'more or less accomplished' (Zamenhof 2007/1887 : 7) – clearly an act of wishful thinking if you consider that at the time of publication his language was a paper project and not tried out as a workable tool for communication in a real society. It is fair to say, though, that this protolanguage had been tested endlessly by Zamenhof himself for its suitability as a literary medium. Therefore, and in all fairness, there was indeed some truth in Zamenhof's 'more or less accomplished'.

With this 'accomplishment' I will begin today's discussion, and I will do so by analyzing and comparing elements of the contemporary language usage with that in the early days of Esperanto. This is a perspective which is hardly ever paid attention to whenever the science of language addresses the topic Esperanto. I think there's no other language in the world than Esperanto which is so overtly ignored as a tool of daily intensive communication among members of a worldwide speech community. As a critical observer and as a language user I will therefore review a number of phenomena in the language which I will then discuss with you in terms of their level of accomplishment or level of success. As we go along, we will discover what can happen to a so-called artificial language which has fallen into the hands of an autonomously and creatively operating speech community.

## 2. Structural versus operational success

In discussing the concept of success I'd like to distinguish between the achievement of the design goals and that of the applicational requirements. In the field of engineering, the design goals refer to properties like robustness and simplicity. When talking about language as the product of an engineering activity we could think of the regularity of its structure, the applicability of analogies and the absence of exceptions to a rule. This determines what I would call the level of structural success of a language. From the point of view of its performance, customer-friendliness, safety and maintainability an engineering product will also be more or less compliant with the requirements imposed on it. This determines its operational success. Let me illustrate the fundamental difference between the two by quoting from my engineering past the design of an aircraft. If an aircraft were to be designed in such a way that under normal operating conditions all its structural parts are simultaneously subjected to the maximum allowable stress, the design would be perfect from this narrow point of view. The structure would, however, have no capability to carry a different load distribution, let alone a statistically less probable but not impossible distribution of higher loads. This aircraft would be operationally unsafe and absolutely useless. Hence, structural perfection can go hand in hand with operational uselessness, which is one more reason to be happy that Umberto Eco's perfect language has fallen into oblivion. The aircraft designer is forced to make extensive trade-offs between satisfying structural and aerodynamic requirements, and many more, and the final success is determined by the design and the operation of the overall system. A system which is structurally sound may turn out to be useless, whereas a system which is at first sight structurally imperfect may still be highly successful. This applies to the products of all branches of engineering, including that of language engineering.

In Esperanto, one subsystem which lends itself to a detailed review of its structural accomplishment is that of the so-called correlatives. These are a set of pronouns and adverbs which can be rendered graphically in a matrix with nine rows and five columns. Let us take the row in the matrix which refers to the category 'persons'. A question introduced by 'who?' can be answered by the demonstrative 'that (one)!', the indefinite 'somebody', the collective 'everybody' or the negative 'nobody'. Together these are five elements. Similarly I create five elements in the row with localizers: 'where?', 'there!', 'somewhere', 'everywhere', 'nowhere'. In 'who – that' and 'where – there' we recognize a pattern which is relatively regular in English, but not in absolute

terms: think of ‘how – so’ or ‘why – for that reason’ displaying different patterns. In Esperanto, the regularity is absolute: all words are built up around the central vowel *i*. This *i* is preceded by a characteristic consonant, like *k* for interrogatives and *t* for demonstratives. Hence *ki-* stands for asking questions and *ti-* for pointing at the answers. The *i* is followed by a characteristic ending, which is *o* for objects (*kio – tio* is ‘what – that’), *a* for qualities (*kia – tia* is ‘what kind of – such a’) and *u* for persons (*kiu – tiu* ‘who – that one’). In many languages this set of 45 small words shows irregularities in the build-up, although they are part of a single coherent superstructure. In Esperanto the regular superstructure of the 9x5 matrix reduces the effort required to learn 45 words which are not all self-explanatory to combining nine and five formatives in an exceptionless pattern of analogies around a single central vowel. In many cases, the word shapes adopted by Zamenhof are acceptable as far as their internationality or recognizability is concerned. The design of the matrix looks good, even perfect, but what about it beyond the design stage, i.e. how does it work in practice?

	Interrogative	Demonstrative	Indefinite	Collective	Negative
Individual	<i>kiu</i> ‘who’	<i>tiu</i> ‘that (one)’	<i>iu</i> ‘somebody’	<i>ĉiu</i> ‘everybody’	<i>neniu</i> ‘nobody’
Thing	<i>kio</i> ‘what’	<i>tio</i>	<i>io</i>	<i>ĉio</i>	<i>nenio</i>
Kind	<i>kia</i> ‘what kind of’	<i>tia</i>	<i>ia</i>	<i>ĉia</i>	<i>nenia</i>
Place	<i>kie</i> ‘where’	<i>tie</i>	<i>ie</i>	<i>ĉie</i>	<i>nenie</i>
Reason	<i>kial</i> ‘why’	<i>tial</i>	<i>ial</i>	<i>ĉial</i>	<i>nenial</i>
Way	<i>kiel</i> ‘how’	<i>tiel</i>	<i>iel</i>	<i>ĉiel</i>	<i>neniel</i>
Quantity	<i>kiom</i> ‘how much’	<i>tiom</i>	<i>iom</i>	<i>ĉiom</i>	<i>neniom</i>
Time	<i>kiam</i> ‘when’	<i>tiam</i>	<i>iam</i>	<i>ĉiam</i>	<i>neniam</i>
Possession	<i>kies</i> ‘whose’	<i>ties</i>	<i>ies</i>	<i>ĉies</i>	<i>nenies</i>

Table of correlatives with one row and one column made explicit

Zamenhof’s scheme maintains a certain level of internationality and is easy to learn. However, the pronunciation of *kiu* for ‘who’ may be uncomfortably close to that of *kio* for ‘what’, that of *kial* for ‘why’ too close to *kiel* for ‘how’. From a functional point of view a higher contrast between the sound structures of such easily interchangeable words would have been better. This remark concerns the phonology of the language. But there is more, e.g. in the area of the morphology. If an Esperanto word is a compound, it is segmentable into its constituent elements, whereby all lexical morphemes, including lexical prefixes and suffixes, can be employed as independent words. In other words, Esperanto has no bound formatives like the English ‘dis-’ in ‘dissatisfy’ or ‘-ery’ in ‘bakery’. The Esperanto equivalent of ‘-ery’ can be recycled and transformed into an independent word meaning ‘place’. When you look at the correlatives in the binding grammar baseline of 1905 (see Zamenhof 1963/1905), you will notice that these words aren’t compounds, but monomorphemic building blocks, shaped the way they are for the ease of learning and memorizing. In spite of this, and after the 1905 baseline had been declared untouchable, Zamenhof accepted a deviation from this overall monomorphemic character of the correlatives. He made this concession as a result of a discussion about the verb *neniigi* which means ‘annihilate’ or ‘destroy’, literally ‘turn into nothing’, composed of the correlative *nenio* ‘nothing’ and the universal transitivizer *-igi* (Zamenhof 1962: 88). In compounding this word, the mnemonic ending *o* of *nenio* ‘nothing’ was mistaken for the grammatical ending *-o* of nouns, incorrectly exchanged for the transitivizer *-igi* and separated from what looked like a word root, but wasn’t. Zamenhof’s concession, which covers all correlatives with the mnemonic endings *o* and *a*, henceforth to be read as true noun and adjective endings, caused a split in the apparently perfect structure of the 9 x 5 matrix and left it with two segmentable rows and seven rows which preserved their original monomorphemic character.

What does this bird’s eye view of the design aspect of the correlatives tell us? The original strict regularity of the system shows a deviation from the rule in two out of nine cases. The design

still looks good, but it isn't perfect. However, the daily practice shows that the language user finds such structural imperfections relatively easy to cope with and that he resorts to all kinds of so-called redundancies in the system. In engineering these are back-up functions, which are activated when a particular subsystem breaks down. In linguistics it works in a similar way. Correlative redundancies are primarily found in the context of the message and in the vocabulary. As back-ups for *kial* 'why' we have the Esperanto equivalent of 'what for' plus synonymous paraphrases and adverbial compounds meaning 'for what reason' and 'for what purpose' and other solutions. Instead of *kiel* 'how' we can apply 'which way', both as a paraphrase and as an adverbial compound, 'by which means', etc. All these solutions provide sharper sound contrasts than *kial* – *kiel*. The Esperanto grammar is full of such redundancies – if it isn't perfect, at least it works successfully and to the full satisfaction of its users. Doesn't this mean that it is, or comes close to what many people like to call a living language, closer perhaps than many of us would have deemed possible? In order to explore this issue I propose to investigate the possible occurrence of spontaneous developments in the language. In a search for confirmation of the 'life hypothesis', it is in the field of such uncontrolled developments that we may find support for this.

### 3. Spontaneous developments as signs of life

This search for uncontrolled changes I performed in a random check between two text corpora which are exactly one hundred years apart. The first one is dated 1903 (Zamenhof 1903) and is a compilation of reading material and literature partly written by Zamenhof himself and partly reviewed and authorized by him for insertion. This source is available in the Gutenberg collection on the Internet. The other corpus is dated 2003 (*Monato* 2003) and consists of the entire annual volume of a monthly socio-cultural magazine archived on the Internet and thus available for research purposes. Both corpora are of approximately the same size and deal with a large variety of general non-specialised subjects. The first phenomenon I'd like to discuss with you is the use of lexical prefixes and suffixes as nuclei of new words (remember, that there are no bound lexical formatives in Esperanto).

Let me give you a few examples based on English. Bread is baked in a bakery, pots are made in a pottery and crude oil is refined in a refinery. The roots in all these localizers refer to the activity which is carried out there or to the subject or product of this activity. The ending '-ery' defines the place where it happens. To the best of my knowledge nobody has ever proposed to use \*ery in English as an independent word with the generic, unspecified meaning 'place' or 'location'. In Esperanto this is possible. All building blocks of a word can be used as independent words. None of these processes is in any way subject to morphosyntactic or distributional restrictions, in other words they are entirely productive and only limited in their scope by semantic constraints of clarity and plausibility. This property facilitates the imaginative handling of all elements of the language, despite the fact that it is often difficult to find an equivalent in one's mother tongue that could be used as a stimulant to activate this creative process. As I said, \*ery does not work in English, as it doesn't work in Dutch, but in Esperanto it does, as I will show you.

My 1903 corpus gives a varied picture of what was possible and what wasn't in the early days. The equivalent of the suffix '-ery' is *-ejo*, but the possible word *ejo* for 'place' does not occur yet. Some other upgraded suffixes do occur as independent words, like *ebla* 'possible' from the suffix *-ebla* meaning 'what can be done'. Note that although the suffix *-ebla* is comparable to '-able' in English, *ebla* as a word just means what *-ebla* as a suffix expresses, unlike the English word 'able', which does not mean 'possible', but 'clever' or 'capable'.

When analyzing the 2003 corpus we see that many of the early 1903 word applications of prefixes and suffixes have been expanded considerably. We also notice numerous new creations, like *ejo* for 'location', which simply did not exist in the older corpus. At the same time there are theoretically feasible forms which have not materialized (yet) and remain latent. It is perhaps good to repeat at this point that there is no rule which prescribes or prevents what happens here.

The one hundred years between 1903 and 2003 do not only show global growth in the number and type of word applications of prefixes and suffixes, but also reveal some interesting shifts. The suffix *-eg* creates augmentatives, so that the significantly more intense level of *varma* ‘warm’ is *varmega* ‘hot’. Conversely, *-et* creates diminutives and the less intense level of *varma* becomes *varmeta* or ‘tepid, lukewarm’. Neither suffix lives an independent word life in the 1903 corpus, but both do in 2003. The new lexical root *eg* meaning something like ‘enormous, colossal’ and *et* meaning ‘small, moderate’ are not only interesting because they exist, but also because they display a surprising asymmetry between adjectival and adverbial applications. The root *eg* materializes almost exclusively as the adverbial modifier *ege* meaning ‘very much, a lot, greatly’ and behaves like a quasi-synonym of *tre*: *ege bona* and *tre bona* both mean ‘very good’. Half the number of occurrences show *ege* in a preverbal position. This is interesting, because it was in this very position that *tre* experienced early competition by *multe* ‘much’ (Wennergren 2006: 277). Many people prefer to translate ‘I thank you very much’ by *Mi multe dankas vin* rather than *Mi tre dankas vin*. It may well be that this trend to distinguish between *tre* before an adjective and *multe* before a verb has its origin in the difference between the adjective modifier *très* and the verb modifier *beaucoup* in French, which has always had a great influence on Esperanto. If this is the case, the less biased and semantically more abstract *ege* would provide a universally attractive alternative for either *tre* or *multe*, so that ‘I thank you very much’ becomes *Mi ege dankas vin*.

In contrast with the adverbial *ege*, the adjectival *ega* ‘colossal’ is hardly attested in the literature. Exactly the reverse happens to the new root *et* from the diminutive suffix, which has produced a common alternative for the rather heavy, three-syllable *malgranda* ‘small, little’ in the form of the adjective *eta*, whereas the theoretical adverb *ete* ‘a little bit’ or ‘moderately’ is non-existent in the modern corpus, probably because the equally short and handy equivalent *iom* has been readily available from the moment the language was published.

#### 4. Artificial, but ...

When I discussed the word shapes chosen by Zamenhof in his table of correlatives I stated that his scheme maintained a certain level of internationality. I must have had examples in mind at that point where the internationality or recognisability is not optimal. One of these is indeed the question word ‘why’ which, as you all know by now, is *kial* in Esperanto. With some effort *kial* may be seen as a derivation from Latin *quare*, but if we look at *why*, *pourquoi*, *warum* and *почему* in English, French, German and Russian, there is absolutely no commonality we can see between them and *kial*. Zamenhof must have given here top priority to the criteria of regularity and easy learning when he decided that ‘why’ and the other elements in this row of the matrix were to have the mnemonic ending *al*. Hence, the couple ‘why – for that reason’ became *kial – tial* and thanks to the absolute regularity of the system we’ve got the handy items *ial*, *ĉial* and *nenial* as a bonus, short forms which can only be rendered by rather long paraphrases like ‘for some reason’, ‘for any reason’ and ‘for no reason at all’. The price we pay for this is a relatively high level of artificiality in terms of non immediate recognizability by a speaker of a West-European language, which is my definition of artificiality here. The question is, how the speech community copes with this.

The couple ‘why – for that reason’ is unavoidable in the linguistic interaction between human beings, no matter how artificial, invented or natural *kial – tial* are. Therefore, it is not surprising that we find them abundantly in both my corpora, but their frequency of occurrence doesn’t tell us anything about the speaker’s attitude to these and comparable words. Because a frozen, written corpus does not provide answers to this question, I performed a simple indirect test. You will remember the suffix based word creations *ejo* for ‘place’, *ebla* for ‘possible’ and *ege* for ‘greatly’. Interestingly enough, a similar process is encountered in the shaping of the noun *kialo* out of the interrogative pronoun *kial*. *Kialo*, literally ‘the why’, appears to be the common Esperanto translation of ‘the reason (why)’. *Kialo*, however, is not attested in the historical dictionary of Zamenhof’s complete works (Nomura 1989) and it doesn’t show up in my 1903 corpus either. In those days, there were two options for translating ‘the reason’: *motivo* ‘motive’ or ‘motivation’ and

the less appropriate *kaŭzo* or ‘cause’. The 2003 corpus reveals that the still occurring *motivo* and *kaŭzo* are now not only in competition with ‘the why’ *kialo*, but that the frequency of this *kialo* is even twice that of *motivo*. Why, in one hundred years of language usage, was ‘the reason why’ not derived from the verb *rezoni* ‘to reason’? *Rezoni* was incorporated in the official lexicon of the language as early as 1909 and provides an internationally recognizable starting point for further derivations or compounds. Instead, the autonomously operating speech community preferred to resort to the rather artificial *kial* and derive from it the even more artificial noun *kialo*, which in the end turned out to be unbeatable. This can only be the result of the community’s positive attitude to the structural potential of the language as such, wherever it comes from.

My second example of a positive attitude to a presumed instance of artificiality concerns the adverb *nepre*. This word, which means ‘irrevocably, absolutely, for sure’, consists of the first two syllables of the Russian *непременно*, which means ‘immutably’. We would have achieved a similar result if we had split ‘irrevocably’ into two halves, one containing the prefixes ‘ir-’ and ‘re-’ and the other one consisting of the remainder ‘-vocably’, in order to create in Esperanto the adverb *\*irre* to translate ‘absolutely’. This is a process that goes well beyond the abbreviation of ‘photographic picture’ to ‘photo’, which continues to carry the meaning ‘light’. It comes closer to our local transport, the ‘bus’, which as a content word is hardly recognizable as the truncated form of a grammatical ending, i.e. the plural dative *omnibus* in Latin, meaning ‘for all’. In the phantasy word *\*irre* and the real word *nepre* we are indeed left with two original prefixes in a morpho-semantic combination which has nothing to do with the content word ‘absolutely’.

In the investigated corpora the occurrence of *nepre* was compared with that of the possible alternatives *neeviteble* ‘inevitably’, *neŝanĝeble* ‘immutably’, *necesege* ‘badly needed’ and *absolute* ‘absolutely’. In 1903 and 2003 the absolute frequencies of *nepre* are the same, a fortunate circumstance which simplifies our calculations. In 1903, only *absolute* offers some competition among the identified options to replace *nepre*, but a hundred years later *nepre* rules alone. For the native speaker of English no foreign translation of the word ‘irrevocably’ comes natural, be it *nepre* in Esperanto, *unwiderruflich* in German, *onherroepelijk* in Dutch or *непременно* in Russian. But the latter three forms have crystallized in these languages as a result of a long and only partly documented history with countless cultural interactions. It is for this reason that they qualify as ‘natural’. The Esperanto word *nepre*, however, was carved out of Russian in a way that could easily have given it a bad start. In spite of all this, *nepre* prevails unthreatened over all its competitors. This observation shows once again how risky it is to narrow the study of Esperanto down to its structure and ignore its application by five to six consecutive generations of speakers and writers worldwide.

I propose to draw up the following intermediate balance. The Esperanto system is not perfect, as could be revealed in a quick review of just one subsystem of its grammar. However, the identified imperfections do not prevent the system from working satisfactorily. This operational success is to a large extent explained by the imaginative recourse to latent capabilities and redundancies in the system. One hundred years of language usage shows unpredicted and uncontrolled, spontaneous evolutions which draw on an apparently much larger potential and which materialize only when they respond to a communicative need felt by the speakers. There appears to be no resistance to using words or applying processes that could be interpreted as artificial or at least as uncommon or unprecedented. This preliminary conclusion is based on my own experience with the language and is supported by a comparison between a few random samples in two text corpora. This comparison seems to point at a number of trends in the dynamics of the language, but, obviously, it would be far too early to claim statistical significance. Further work in this field is badly needed. Let me try and bring the different points together and see if we can converge them to an overall conclusion.

## 5. The AAA rating of Esperanto

Let's turn back to the roots for an instant. In reviewing the rules contained in the original grammar of Esperanto (Zamenhof 2007/1887: 35-40) I was able to produce a set of some twenty linguistic features which I take as the basic pattern of Esperanto. As typical examples of these features I quote the vowel and consonant inventories of the language, the kind of morphology it has, the basic constituent order in the syntax and the form and contents of its early vocabulary. These features can then be classified in a cross-linguistic comparison as typically European or typically non-European, and as worldwide dominant or not dominant. If we consider that all significant source languages of Esperanto are Indo-European, it should not be surprising to anybody that the net sum of pluses and minuses tends toward typically European. Let's forget about the details and concentrate, instead, on two features which are essential in our discussion today. Both deviate from the European model and both are non-dominant on a worldwide scale. In the first place I mention the very non-European total lack of person marking in the conjugated verb. Secondly, there is the word formation technique as the most salient aspect of the feature morphology. This feature seems to isolate Esperanto from a great many if not all other languages and, therefore, classify it as nobody's language, which is the same as saying everybody's language.

Hopefully I've been able to correct the impression some of you may have had before coming here today that Esperanto with its Mediterranean sounding name would be some sort of a common Romance denominator. Indeed, the language has inherited a lot from Romance, but so it has from Germanic and from Slavic, and it has a number of features it shares with all these language families. There is more: first of all there are the unidentifiable or artificial elements, which we discussed in some detail and, last but not least, the language uses mechanisms for verbal inflexion and word formation which are cross-linguistically non-European and worldwide non-dominant. These unique properties give Esperanto a structural autonomy which largely exceeds the boundaries of a European average or common denominator. This structural autonomy feeds the psychological autonomy of the language, i.e. the feeling that it is *my* language, that it is *my* privilege to play with it as it suits me, and to know that there are no native speakers around thinking: "Well, grammatically speaking it may be correct what he says, but it's not quite the way we do it." The step from the psychological autonomy of the individual speaker to that of an entire speech community leads us to the concept of political neutrality. Choosing Esperanto, rather than the highly probable English or the improbable Dutch, to assist in the communication between British and Dutch officials as representatives of their communities would give both parties in the debate the same amount of communicative power. If we expand this British-Dutch conversation to the European Parliament with its 27 member-states and 23 official languages, one language that is nobody's and everybody's at the same time could replace 253 different bilingual scenarios and spread the power of speech evenly among all participants.

Going back to the beginning of this discussion and recalling Zamenhof's modest assessment of his language project as 'more or less accomplished', I think it is fully justified to correct him here, after 122 years of usage, and give the language in banking terms a AAA rating, the three A's representing the three aspects of Autonomy I identified: the structural, the individual psychological and the collective psychological or political autonomy.

If I may remind you of our central topic of today, i.e. how we identify ourselves with the language we speak, I'll focus once more on the psychological autonomy of the language. I'm convinced that any researcher who would decide to join me in a serious field study among Esperanto speakers will confirm with me that many speakers display levels of courage and imaginative handling of the spoken language which are rather unusual for second language users. But the AAA of Esperanto has yet another effect on many of its speakers: they appear to develop an affinity or even affection for the language, which are not only unusual, but highly exceptional for a language which isn't your own. The transparency of the grammatical structure strengthens the self-confidence of speakers and encourages them not to shun the cross-linguistic debate, but to engage in it with confidence. Thus, the language as a *tool* – just like French but easier – may develop into a

*bond*, an expression of cross-cultural solidarity among the participants in the debate. During my first international career in aerospace engineering, English was my exclusive working language in writing and the predominant working language in oral contacts for 25 years. During this long exposure my handling of English may have become spontaneous to some extent, but I never developed a special affection for the language. In this respect, the bond of identification with my second family language Italian is a lot stronger. But I must confess that in the end, next to Dutch, only Esperanto feels mine.

## Literature

**Eco**, Umberto (1993) *La Ricerca della Lingua Perfetta nella Cultura Europea*. Rome: Laterza.

**Minnaja**, Carlo (1996) 'Tra lupeo filozofa kaj lingvista' in *Esperanto*, 1083 (7-8): 133. Rotterdam. *Monato* 2003/1-2003/12 (2003). Antwerp.

**Nomura**, Rihej (1989) *Zamenhofa Ekzemplaro*. Nagoya: Nagoja Esperanto-Centro.

**Wennergren**, Bertilo (2006) *Plena Manlibro de Esperanta Gramatiko*. El Cerrito CA: Esperanto-Ligo por Norda Ameriko.

**Zamenhof**, Lejzer (1903) *Fundamenta Krestomatio de la Lingvo Esperanto*. Paris: Hachette.

**Zamenhof**, Lejzer (1962) *Lingvaj respondoj, konsiloj kaj opinioj*. Marmande: Esperantaj Francaj Eldonoj (sixth edition, prepared by Gaston Waringhien, of Zamenhof's original articles and letters written between 1889 and 1912).

**Zamenhof**, Lejzer (1963/1905) *Fundamento de Esperanto*. Marmande: Esperantaj Francaj Eldonoj (ninth scientific edition, prepared by André Albault, of the original, Paris: Hachette, 1905).

**Zamenhof**, Lejzer (2007/1887) *Meždunarodnyj Jazyk. Predislovie i polnyj učebnik*. Moscow: Impeto (photographic reprint of the original, Warsaw: Kelter, 1887).