

## **Can complexity be planned?**

Ilona Koutny

Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

The complexity invariance is discussed in the case of natural languages in terms of the innate language faculty and cultural influences in a context where pidgins and planned languages have been excluded (Hudson in Sampson et al. 2009). This paper involves the planned language Esperanto which is now often considered to be a natural language (e.g. Lindstedt, Tonkin).

As a language that came into existence as a result of conscious planning, Esperanto is meant to be simple and regular, that is with a low degree of complexity compared to ethnic languages which have undergone many changes throughout their history. The maintenance of simplicity in Esperanto supports the theory of Trudgill (2011), who claims that the complexity of languages decrease as a function of adults learning and using them. Esperanto is normally a second (or more) language for its speakers although there are some native Esperanto speakers (Lindstedt 2006). It could also be considered as a contact language (Lindstedt 2009).

Using linguistic data bases, the complexity of Esperanto will be investigated at the phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic levels. A planned inventory of 27 phonemes (including five cardinal vowels) are well within the average range of natural languages. Later development of the language has tended to reduce this slightly through the marginalization of the velar fricative *ĥ*.

The morphological complexity of Esperanto is minimal due to its unchangeable morphemes which have clear-cut functions and are therefore always applicable when there is no semantic restriction. Declension operates with two cases, and the conjugation with three tenses and three modes. Verbs are not marked for person or number. Compared to agglutinative languages as Hungarian, it shows a high degree of simplicity.

In some languages simple morphology is balanced by complicated syntax. In the case of Esperanto, however, the basic syntax is also simple. The use of accusative ending permit a free word (constituent) order. Different syntactic structures can be used and acceptable due to the flexible structure of the language, e.g. adjective can precede or follow the noun. Corpus researches nevertheless show a strong tendency toward SVO order (Jansen 2006).

The semantic complexity prevails in English, and compensates for the basic morphology. The semantic complexity of Esperanto is also low, but not its expressive power. While the initiator of Esperanto, Ludovic Zamenhof based his language on the Romance, Germanic, and Slavic languages, he arbitrary reduced complex meanings in the source language in the process of adapting these words, in order to have a non-ambiguous system.

This same principle, however, could not hold during the development of the language within a language community because of several factors. These include a lack of precise definition of word meanings in the beginning, language economy, and the use of the language by speakers with different language backgrounds through the world. The statement of Saussure proved to be true that there will be different changes in meanings. A language begins its autonomous semantic life when it becomes commonly used. Nowadays Esperanto has many synonyms, cases of polysemy, metaphors and a (rather transparent) phraseology (Fiedler 1999). The current semantics are the result of ongoing negotiation in social interactions by speakers and literary works, so the sociological approach of Trudgill can be applied to Esperanto as well.

Research on the ongoing development of Esperanto can reveal how some linguistic processes take place.

## References

- Fiedler, Sabine 1999: *Plansprache und Phraseologie. Empirische Untersuchungen zu reproduziertem Sprachmaterial im Esperanto*). Frankfurt/M.: Lang
- Jansen, Wim 2006: Wortstellungsmodelle im ursprünglichen und im heutigen Esperanto - Zeugen einer natürlichen Entwicklung der Syntax? Proceedings of the 16th annual meeting of the Gesellschaft für Interlinguistik. Berlin
- Lindstedt, Jouko 2006: Native Esperanto as a Test Case for Natural Language. In: *A Man of Measure. Festschrift in Honour of Fred Karlsson*. SKY Journal of Linguistics vol 19: 47–55  
[http://www.linguistics.fi/julkaisut/SKY2006\\_1/1FK60.1.5.LINDSTEDT.pdf](http://www.linguistics.fi/julkaisut/SKY2006_1/1FK60.1.5.LINDSTEDT.pdf)
- Lindstedt, Jouko 2009: Esperanto – an East European contact language? In: *Die Europäizität der Slawia oder die Slawizität Europas. Studies in language and culture in Central and Eastern Europe*. vol. 2, Munchen; Berlin: Otto Sagner: 125-134
- Sampson, Geoffrey & Gil, David & Trudgill, Peter (eds) 2009: *Language Complexity as an Evolving Variable*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Saussure, Ferdinand de (1913)1995: *Cours de linguistique générale*. éd. Payot.
- Tonkin, Humhrey 2010: Translating in Translation Lecture for the Princeton Program in Translation.  
<http://www.princeton.edu/~piirs/programs/PTIC/Docs/Tonkin%202010.pdf>
- Trudgill, Peter 2011: *Sociolinguistic Typology: Social Determinants of Linguistic Complexity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press