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LANGX - An Introduction for Bahá'ís

The third Glad-Tidings

concerneth the study of divers languages. This decree hath formerly streamed forth from the Pen of the Most High: It behoveth the sovereigns of the world - may God assist them - or the ministers of the earth to take counsel together and to adopt one of the existing languages or a new one to be taught to children in schools throughout the world, and likewise one script. Thus the whole earth will come to be regarded as one country. Well is it with him who hearkeneth unto His Call and observeth that whereunto he is bidden by God, the Lord of the Mighty Throne.

Bishárát

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh p 22

The sixth Ishraq

is union and concord amongst the children of men. From the beginning of time the light of unity hath shed its divine radiance upon the world, and the greatest means for the promotion of that unity is for the peoples of the world to understand one another's writing and speech. In former Epistles We have enjoined upon the Trustees of the House of Justice either to choose one language from among those now existing or to adopt a new one, and in like manner to choose a common script, both of which should be taught in all the schools of the world.

Ishráqát Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

p 127

Bahá'u'lláh gives mankind a choice between an existing and a new language for the international auxiliary language (IAL). In reality these alternatives are not as different as one might think, since every prospective existing language has incorporated new words and constructions at various times during its history, and a new

language would necessarily contain words and linguistic elements that have proved their worth in existing languages.

The existing language most favoured for the IAL role is English, though its official adoption is by no means the foregone conclusion that many English-speakers anticipate (please see the "Introduction" and/or the opening chapters of "Lango"). English also has a special status within the Bahá'í Faith, of course. For instance, we know that the Guardian translated a large portion of the Bahá'í Writings, as well as Nabil's Dawn-Breakers, into English, that the UHJ conducts most of its proceedings in the language, and that English has been the official language of global Bahá'í conventions such as the Official Opening of the Terraces in May 2001.

Until quite recently, a number of Bahá'ís in the West thought the "existing language" might be Arabic, based on Adib Taherzadeh's comments regarding Bahá'u'lláh's "Tablet of the International Auxiliary Language and Script":

"In this Tablet Bahá'u'lláh praises the Arabic language for its expressiveness and eloquence, and remarks that no other language can match its vast possibilities. He further states that God would be pleased if all the peoples of the world were to speak the Arabic language. But he does not require humanity necessarily to adopt it as the international language; rather He leaves the choice to the appropriate institutions."

Adib
Taherzadeh The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Vol
4, p 160

However, the following quotation from "Mahmúd's Diary" - an authentic record of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's utterances - seems to have removed that possibility:

He was invited later to the Golden Circle Club where He was asked whether Arabic might become the universal language. He said that it would not. He was then asked about Esperanto. He replied:

A few weeks ago, I wrote a letter from New York to one of the promoters of Esperanto telling him that this language could become universal if a council of delegates chosen from among the nations and rulers were established which would discuss Esperanto and consider the means to promote it.

Golden
Circle Club, Boston 24 July 1912 Mahmúd's Diary p 179
- 180

'Abdu'l-Bahá's advocacy of Esperanto is well-known, e.g.:

All through America I have encouraged the Bahá'ís to study Esperanto and to the extent of my ability I will strive in its spread and promotion.

quoted

by Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, 18 Dec 1912 Star of the West, Vol 3, No 19

....From such illustrations you will admit that the greatest thing in the world is to be able to make yourself understood by your friends and to understand them, and that there is no greater handicap in the world than not to be able to communicate your thoughts to others. But with an auxiliary language all these difficulties disappear.

Now, praise be to God, that language has been created - Esperanto. This is one of the special gifts of this luminous century, one of the most remarkable achievements of this great age.

His Holiness BAHÁ'O'LLAH many years ago wrote a book called "The Most Holy Book", one of the fundamental principles of which is the necessity of creating an International Language, and He explains the great good and advantage that will result from its use.

Now let us thank the Lord because the Esperanto language has been created. We have commanded all the Bahais in the Orient to study this language very carefully, and ere long it will be spread all over the East. I pray you, Esperantists and non-Esperantists, to work with zeal for the spread of this language, for it will hasten the coming of that day, that millennial day, foretold by prophets and seers, that day when, it is said, the wolf and the lamb shall drink from the same fountain, the lion and the deer shall feed in the same pasture. The meaning of this holy word is that hostile races, warring nations, differing religions, shall become united in the spirit of love.

I repeat, the most important thing in the world is the realization of an auxiliary international language. Oneness of language will transform mankind into one world, remove religious misunderstandings, and unite East and West in the spirit of brotherhood and love. Oneness of language will change this world from many families into one family. This auxiliary international language will gather the nations under one standard, as if the five continents of the world had become one, for then mutual interchange of thought will be possible for all. It will remove ignorance and superstition, since each child of whatever race or nation can pursue his studies in science and art, needing but two languages - his own and the International. The world of matter will become the expression of the world of mind. Then discoveries will be revealed, inventions will multiply, the sciences advance by leaps and bounds, the scientific culture of the earth will develop along broader lines. Then the nations will be enabled to utilize the latest and best thought,

because expressed in the International Language.

If the International Language becomes a factor of the future, all the Eastern peoples will be enabled to acquaint themselves with the sciences of the West, and in turn the Western nations will become familiar with the thoughts and ideas of the East, thereby improving the condition of both. In short, with the establishment of this International Language the world of mankind will become another world and extraordinary will be the progress. It is our hope, then, that the language Esperanto will soon spread throughout the whole world, in order that all people may be able to live together in the spirit of friendship and love.

Edinburgh Esperanto Society 7 January 1913 Star of the West,
Vol 4, No 2

....Praise be to God, that Dr Zamenhof has created the Esperanto language. It has all the potential qualities of universal adoption. All of us must be grateful and thankful to him for his noble effort, for in this matter he has served his fellowmen well. He has constructed a language which will bestow divine benefits on all peoples. With untiring efforts and self-sacrifice on the part of its devotees it gives promise of universal acceptance. Therefore everyone of us must study this language and make every effort to spread it so that each day it may receive a wider recognition, be accepted by all nations and governments of the world and become a part of the curriculum in all the public schools. I hope that the business of the future conferences and congresses will be carried on in Esperanto. In the future two languages will be taught in the schools, one the native tongue, the other the international auxiliary language. Consider today how difficult is human communication. One may study 50 languages and yet travel through a country and still be at a loss. I, myself, know several of the Oriental languages, but know no Western tongue. Had this universal language pervaded the globe, I should have studied it and you would have been directly informed of my thoughts and I of yours and a special friendship would have been established between us.

Please send some teachers to Persia, if you can, so that they may teach Esperanto to the young people. I have written asking some of them to come here to study it.

I hope that it will be promulgated very rapidly - then the world of humanity will find eternal peace; all the nations will associate with one another like mothers and sisters, fathers and brothers, and each individual member of the body politic will be fully informed of the thoughts of all.....

Paris

Esperanto Society 12 February 1913 Star of the West, Vol 4,

No 2

From such passages in the Writings, some have gained the impression that the only requirement is for Esperanto to be promoted. But a careful examination of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's utterances on this subject will show that He also required Esperanto to be revised, as He hinted to the Esperantists of Paris in the above quotation, and stated more explicitly elsewhere (my emphasis):

Praise be to God, that Dr Zamenhof has created the Esperanto language. It has all the potential qualities of universal adoption. All of us must be grateful and thankful to him for his noble effort, for in this matter he has served his fellowmen well. He has constructed a language which will bestow divine benefits on all peoples. With untiring efforts and self-sacrifice on the part of its devotees it gives promise of universal acceptance. Therefore everyone of us must study this language and make every effort to spread it so that each day it may receive a wider recognition, be accepted by all nations and governments of the world and become a part of the curriculum in all the public schools. I hope that the business of the future conferences and congresses will be carried on in Esperanto.

Paris, 12 February 1913 Star of the West, Vol 4,
No 2

We must endeavour with all our powers to establish this international auxiliary language (Esperanto) throughout the world. It is my hope that it may be perfected through the bounties of God and that intelligent men may be selected from the various countries of the world to organize an international congress whose chief aim will be the promotion of this universal medium of speech.

Washington,
25 April 1912 Promulgation of Universal Peace,
p 61

Esperanto has been drawn up with this end (universal language) in view: it is a fine invention and a splendid piece of work, but it needs perfecting. Esperanto as it stands is very difficult for some people.

An international Congress should be formed, consisting of delegates from every nation of the world, Eastern as well as Western. This Congress should form a language that could be acquired by all, and every country would thereby reap great benefit.

Paris, 13 November 1911 Paris Talks,
p 156

Thou hast written regarding to language of Esperanto. This language will be spread and universalized to a certain degree, but

later on a language more complete than this, or the same language will undergo some changes and alterations and will be adopted and become universal. I hope that Dr, Zamenhof, become assisted by the invisible confirmation and do a great service to the world of humanity.

Tablets

of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Vol III. p 692

The problem, of course, is that Esperanto has never been fundamentally revised, or "perfected", as 'Abdu'l-Bahá required. In Chapter 5 of LANGO we offered some reasons for this serious omission. A declining prestige and influence in the world appears to have been the consequence. Moreover, it might seem that the force of Bahá'í encouragement to learn Esperanto has declined in tandem.

Praise be to God, that Dr Zamenhof has created the Esperanto language. It has all the potential qualities of universal adoption. All of us must be grateful and thankful to him for his noble effort, for in this matter he has served his fellowmen well. He has constructed a language which will bestow divine benefits on all peoples. With untiring efforts and self-sacrifice on the part of its devotees it gives promise of universal acceptance. Therefore everyone of us must study this language and make every effort to spread it so that each day it may receive a wider recognition, be accepted by all nations and governments of the world and become a part of the curriculum in all the public schools. I hope that the business of the future conferences and congresses will be carried on in Esperanto.

'Abdu'l-Bahá,

Paris, 12 February 1913 Star of the West, Vol 4,

No 2

Regarding the subject of Esperanto; it should be made clear to the believers that while the teaching of that language has been repeatedly encouraged by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, there is no reference either from Him or from Bahá'u'lláh that can make us believe that it will necessarily develop into the international auxiliary language of the future. Bahá'u'lláh has specified in His Writings that such a language will either have to be chosen from one of the existing languages, or an entirely new one should be created to serve as a medium of exchange between the nations and peoples of the world. Pending this final choice, the Bahá'ís are advised to study Esperanto only in consideration of the fact that the learning of this language can considerably facilitate intercommunication between individuals, groups and Assemblies throughout the Bahá'í world in the present state of the evolution of the Faith.

written on behalf of the Guardian to

the NSA of the US & Canada 4 June 1937

We feel that, within the framework of their efforts for the promotion of peace, the Bahá'ís of Europe would do well to increase their collaboration with the Esperanto Movement, and we encourage Bahá'ís who feel the urge to assist in this area, to learn Esperanto and take an active part in the activities of the Movement. As you know, although both 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi have made it clear that it is by no means certain that Esperanto will be chosen as the international auxiliary language of the world, 'Abdu'l-Bahá encouraged the friends in the east and the west to learn it as a practical step in the promotion of the concept of the adoption of an international auxiliary language to break down the barriers to understanding between peoples.

Universal

House of Justice 17 September 1986 letter to NSAs
in Europe

In the absence of a fundamental revision of Esperanto, LangX attempts to illustrate the qualities a constructed IAL might be expected to possess. Left deliberately unfinished, it exists solely for the purpose of criticism and discussion. There are many other IALs out there which are better in various ways, but a competition between IALs is really not the point. Now is surely the time for synthesis. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá may well have said in London (see below): "no one person can construct a Universal Language"; on the contrary, He asserted that the IAL must be "formed" or "selected" by an international committee:

We must endeavour with all our powers to establish this international auxiliary language (Esperanto) throughout the world. It is my hope that it may be perfected through the bounties of God and that intelligent men may be selected from the various countries of the world to organize an international congress whose chief aim will be the promotion of this universal medium of speech.

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Paris, 13

November 1911 Paris Talks, p 156

Ninth, a universal language shall be adopted and be taught by all the schools and institutions in the world. A committee appointed by national bodies of learning shall select a suitable language to be used as a medium of international communication. All must acquire it. This is one of the great factors in the unification of man.

The

Promulgation of Universal Peace, p 182

In order to facilitate complete understanding between all people, a universal auxiliary language will be adopted and in the schools of the future two languages will be taught - the mother tongue and this international auxiliary tongue which will be either one of the existing languages, or a new language made up of words from all the languages - the matter to be determined by a confederation met for the purpose which shall represent all tribes and nations. This international tongue will be used in the parliament of man - a supreme tribunal of the world which will be permanently established in order to arbitrate international questions.

'Abdu'l-Bahá

on Divine Philosophy, p 84

Whether the said congress, committee or confederation will choose "one of the existing languages, or a new language made up of words from all the languages" is open to question. Many people still believe that English will be the chosen language, and not without reason: it is certainly the foremost auxiliary language in the world today, whether in terms of geographical spread or global influence. For instance, English has an official status in air and maritime telecommunications, a shared primacy with French as one of the two "working languages" at the United Nations, and the biggest role of any language at international scientific conferences and business conventions. Robert Craig and I examined the current position of English in the first four chapters of LANGO.

However, since the institution choosing the IAL is likely to be secular humanist, with corresponding tendencies towards "political correctness", and away from possible imputations of "élitism", "neo-colonialism" etc., there is every chance that it will choose neither English nor any other major existing language, but rather "a new language made up of words from all the languages". A well-known paragraph in 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London addresses the linguistic constitution of the latter alternative:

A friend enquired concerning Bahá'u'lláh's prophecy in the Words of Paradise that a universal language would be formed, and desired to know if Esperanto would be the language chosen.

"The love and effort put into Esperanto will not be lost", he answered, "but no one person can construct a Universal Language. It must be made by a Council representing all countries, and must contain words from different languages. It will be governed by the simplest rules, and there will be no exceptions; neither will there be gender, nor extra and silent letters. Everything indicated will have but one name. In Arabic there are hundreds of names for the camel! In the schools of each nation the mother tongue will be taught, as well as the revised Universal Language."

'Abdu'l-Bahá
in London, p 94

'Abdu'l-Bahá in London has been referred to as "Pilgrim's Notes"; and since the Universal House of Justice has approved the Bahá'í Publishing Trust's statement that the translation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words cannot be verified, because the original is no longer available, this is fair comment. However, in view of this quotation's potential importance, it might also be borne in mind that the expression "Pilgrim's Notes" covers a spectrum of material from the dubious to the very probably authentic, and that 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London was published in 1912, well within 'Abdu'l-Bahá's lifetime, and was presumably the object of close attention, given that not much Bahá'í literature was then translated into English. Moreover, Lady Blomfield, the compiler of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London and Paris Talks, was an intimate friend of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and His family, as testified by her book "The Chosen Highway". Did anyone object at the time that the text of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London was inauthentic in any way?

Also, there is the following extract from a letter by Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, dated 17 December 1912:

This morning 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke about America and the probability of his return to that country. He said: "God willing! If I go to America another time I will go differently; but it is very difficult. This first trip was made with great exertion." As I was reading one of his addresses delivered in America, he said it would be well if all his addresses in that country could be printed in one or two volumes. At present, he declared, they are all scattered and not collected. He called attention to how quickly the Paris and London addresses delivered last year were printed; and this was done through one woman, Lady Blomfield. Some one mentioned the name of a prominent wealthy woman and he said: "One of these poor, sincere and honest women is more beloved by me than a thousand millionaires; just now this Lady Blomfield is dearer to me than all the queens of the world."

Star
of the West, Vol 3, No 19

One problem with an unrevised Esperanto is that it is explicitly an auxiliary language: Esperanto was designed to be an adjunct to the various mother tongues, and remains so in concept. But Bahá'u'lláh makes it clear that the ultimate goal is for everyone to speak one rather than two languages:

We have formerly ordained that people should converse in two languages, yet efforts must be made to reduce them to one, likewise the scripts of the world, that men's lives may not be dissipated and wasted in learning divers languages. Thus the whole earth would come to be regarded as one city and one land.

Kalimat-i-Firdawsiiyih (Words of Paradise) Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh,
p 68

Second: Languages must be reduced to one common language to be taught in all the schools of the world.

Lawh-i-Dunya
(Tablet of the World) Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p 89

Likewise He saith: Among the things which are conducive to unity and concord and will cause the whole earth to be regarded as one country is that the divers languages be reduced to one language and in like manner the scripts used in the world be confined to a single script. It is incumbent upon all nations to appoint some men of understanding and erudition to convene a gathering and through joint consultation choose one language from among the varied existing languages, or create a new one, to be taught in all the schools of the world.

Lawh-i-Maqsud (Tablet of Maqsud) Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh,
p 165

The transition from two languages (i.e. the multitude of mother-tongues, each paired with the IAL), to a single global tongue for every person on Earth in the distant future, is the central theme of the World Language Program, LangX, The IAL Hierarchy etc.. Hopefully the errors and inadequacies of our approach will spark others to greater endeavours and insights.

But regarding the universal language: Ere long significant and scientific discussions concerning this matter will arise among the people of discernment and insight and it will produce the desired result.

Tablets
of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Vol III, p 692

The day is approaching when all the peoples of the world will have adopted one universal language and one common script. When this is

achieved, to whatsoever city a man may journey, it shall be as if he is entering his own home. These things are obligatory and essential. It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action....

from

the Lawh-i-Maqsud, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 165

INTRODUCTION

(a) About the
World Language Program (b) A
Summary

(a) About the
World Language Program

1: What is the World Language Program?

The World

Language Program promotes the selection or formation of an international auxiliary language and script (IAL) according to scientific criteria by a globally representative congress or committee. We envisage the IAL as the first step towards a single world language and script in the distant future. The World Language Program is also pursuing a number of related projects including online translation and electronic databases. Construction of the World Language Program Universal Language Institute at Horning's Mills, Ontario, Canada is scheduled to begin in 2005.

2: Assuming a globally representative congress or committee could agree on an IAL, wouldn't it be an unwieldy compromise? Wouldn't a functionable language require the coherent vision that only an inspired individual could provide?

No single

person can possibly know enough to construct the IAL. The history of the movement has demonstrated this, though Schleyer, Zamenhof and others deserve every plaudit for their valiant attempts. Informal collaborations have fared no better: they have always split on controversial issues.

A congress or

committee solves these problems by vesting authority in its unanimous or majority opinion. Of course there is a danger in this too, so a properly constituted arrangement is necessary - one which incorporates systematic consultation with all interested parties into the decision-making process. There is no reason, in fact, why the official committee and their consultees should not collaborate for the benefit all concerned.

3: Wouldn't each member of the international committee seek only that the IAL conformed as far as possible to their own language, in whose favour they were likely to be prejudiced, albeit unconsciously?

The common language question has returned to the fore as rising international tensions have raised the tempo and importance of communications. The deepening global recession has also served to move the IAL question up the political agenda. In the context of straitened economic circumstances the increasing cost of translation (and mistranslation) in the world's expanding unions of nation states has come into focus, as has the cost of foreign language teaching in state education systems. International agencies are becoming ever more receptive to the idea that an IAL would begin to eliminate these costs. At some stage in the not-so-distant future an international committee is likely to be appointed and told to get on with it - and its members may have no choice but to give at least as much weight to facility of global communication as to sectional familiarity, i.e. "user-friendliness" for various peoples .

The advance of scientific linguistics is another factor that will help to maintain a proper balance with political interests. A great deal of high-quality research now exists concerning subjects which might be expected to inform and influence the course of IAL discussion and decision-making: comparative grammar and phonology, childhood speech and literacy acquisition etc..

4: Isn't English already the international auxiliary language for all practical purposes?

Not really, though some of its proponents in the media might convey that impression. English does have semi-official status in a few specialised fields, including air and maritime telecommunications, but even there its use is far from universal. Having said that, it's undoubtedly true that English is the leading auxiliary language in the world today, and will continue as such for a long time to come - whatever is decided concerning the IAL. As for English itself being officially selected, we think it most unlikely - for historical political reasons, and because of an irregular spelling system which has proved highly resistant to reform.

Moreover, as has often been pointed out, the pre-eminence of the English language relates more to the current status of English-speaking civilisation than to its inherent qualities. If the dominance of the English-speaking countries - which has arguably lasted from 1815 to

the present - were to be superseded, the English language might consequently be expected to go the way of Ancient Greek, Latin, Arabic and French. The demise of the British Empire, the relative economic decline of America, the reversion of several ex-colonies to native languages, the establishment of rival languages in former English-speaking heartlands, and the continued political and cultural opposition to the English language from various quarters in several countries - all these are indications that the dethronement of English might already be proceeding.

The following statements are pertinent in this regard, though over a decade old:

....."In 1989 a study conducted in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain concluded: "The real correct understanding of English in all the countries studied is notably inferior to the most pessimistic existing evaluations and our own guesstimates" Van de Sandt, Report in "Initiative Media News Bulletin" (London: Lintas Worldwide, January 1989)

.....In 1990 Sir (now Lord) Randolph Quirk, Professor of English at University College in London, put it thus: "Despite the persistent and glib assumptions in Britain and America, we are witnessing a significant relative decline (perhaps even an absolute decline) in the currency of English worldwide. This may come as a surprise to those who think of English as the medium of high-tech skills, international conferences, and professional journals: here indeed continued growth is doubtless the order of the day. But these are relatively slim and specialized lines of communication."

.....In 1991 Richard Bailey, Professor of English Language and Literature at the the University of Michigan and Associate Editor of the "Oxford Companion to the English Language" was even more specific: "The proportion of the world's population who regularly use English is 15% - and falling".

5: Esperanto is a perfectly adequate IAL which only needs support. Esperanto's official adoption and consequent implementation through educational systems worldwide would be hastened if sites such as this promoted it.

We believe that the international congress or committee which chooses or forms the IAL will in effect be revising Esperanto. The love and effort put into Esperanto will be realised in the coming IAL, which will be constructed very much upon its basis and inspired by its continuing influence. However, Esperanto as presently constituted looks most

unlikely to gain the popular support necessary to become de facto IAL, or even to be officially appointed for the role. The absence of a thorough reform to make Esperanto more globally acceptable must be partly responsible: for instance, Esperanto's grammar is especially difficult for various peoples. There are a number of criticisms of Esperanto on the Internet; this one is probably the most comprehensive.

6: "East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet!" Kipling's sentiment remains as true today: cultures are essentially self-contained and will remain so; no more than the most basic IAL will ever be required.

There are two schools of thought here. On the one hand, there are those who believe that, after the IAL is officially instituted, everyone will always and for all time speak at least two languages - the various mother-tongues for domestic consumption and the IAL for international communication. These hold that the primary focus of culture is national or ethnic, but that international agencies are necessary in order to support the requisite level of material civilisation - through trade, tourism, transport, communications, science, peace-keeping and the like. In other words, the international agencies deal in mundanities, whereas the more spiritual side of life - whether found through historic religions, secular philosophies, national treasures of literature etc. - is not "global" or "international" in any real sense, since it is always linked to a particular culture or tradition.

On the other hand are those who discount the possibility of self-sufficient or autonomous entities communicating indefinitely on a second-hand basis, believing that all languages will eventually merge into a single language by way of an official IAL, and claiming that this process is merely a conscious continuation of what is already occurring. Decades or centuries after the official IAL inauguration, everyone might still learn at least two languages at school, but they would expect the IAL to develop relative to the mother tongues.

They would point to the precedent of pidgins and creoles, inasmuch as pidgins were IALs on a smaller scale, formulated for essentially the same reason - the pertinent fact about pidgins being their tendency to become creolised: a process shown to derive from children learning and using the pidgin as a mother tongue. Thus, although pidgins were originally employed as purely auxiliary trading languages - second languages that nobody used as a mother tongue - children of certain traders, seafarers etc. evidently learned the pidgins as mother tongues, and elaborated them with borrowed or intuitive grammatical

constructions and new words from various sources - exactly as tends to happen with mother tongues or primary languages in their developmental phase.

Correspondingly, since the IAL will begin its life essentially as a global pidgin, there is every chance that it will be elaborated by future generations in a similar way and for the same reasons. The modern world contains an ever-increasing number of itinerant key workers and administrative personnel employed by transnational corporations and international agencies. Such people will find the IAL particularly useful, whether or not they possess other second languages such as English, and consequently the children of some of them are likely to pick up the IAL as a mother tongue. The intuitive elaboration of the IAL might then be expected to follow, in concert with more formal and conscious innovative attempts by authors, advertisers, film-makers etc. who might well wish to write in the IAL directly in order to access the global market, the whole being co-ordinated and kept within acceptable bounds by the IAL committee.

Assuming this process of development came to pass, the relationship between the IAL and every national tongue would be comparable to that which formerly existed between the minority ethnic tongues and the great national languages which entirely surrounded them. Thus, even as islands of minority ethnic tongues have been surrounded by a sea of English, every language would eventually find itself within the matrix of the IAL. And correspondingly, even as English formerly diluted and absorbed minority ethnic tongues in its midst, English would itself be absorbed, along with all other languages, into one universal tongue of enormous capacity and subtlety.

The history of the dogged survival of certain minority ethnic tongues clearly shows that such a process would never be achieved by force, rather would it happen for cultural and economic reasons. Thus, if speakers and writers were to deliberately use the international auxiliary language to reach the widest possible audience or readership, and listeners were to learn it - and tune into it - to keep up with the latest news and newest thought from anywhere in the world, there is little doubt that this common language would develop its own character as a truly global tongue, even as primary creative impetus went into it. If this did indeed happen - whether through neologism, transliteration, or other aspects of linguistic development - the national languages of the world could be expected to successively abandon their separate identities, over a period of centuries, in order to become part of it: in the same way that some minority ethnic tongues have hitherto become submerged in national languages.

Thus there is

no reason to suppose that an international auxiliary consciously developed for creative usage would not gradually obtain the linguistic and euphonic capacity to incorporate all useful features, whether structural or decorative, from both "national" and constructed languages. Indeed, it might well display these assets more precisely and harmoniously than their own more or less irregular grammars, partial phonologies and ramshackle orthographies. In such a scenario the mother-tongues would continue to be preserved in written and recorded form, but ultimately for sentimental value rather than linguistic information.

7: Shouldn't the international committee choose an entirely neutral language, equally easy or difficult for all nationalities?

An entirely

neutral language would be very difficult if not impossible to realise in practice. For instance, unless the script were bi-directional, or vertical perhaps, it would favour either the left-to-right majority or the right-to-left minority. Similarly, there would have to be a choice between logographic and alphabetic script - the former benefiting East Asian countries such as China and Japan, and the latter the rest of the world. Much the same might be said about phonology and grammar. Moreover, even if a "horizontal" neutrality were achievable between the very diverse languages and scripts of the world, there might still be the problem of finding a "vertical" neutrality, or median position, between linguists and non-linguists. Briefly, there is no advantage in reinventing the wheel, so far as the IAL is concerned. Even a brand new solution of apparently impeccable political correctness would inevitably contain hidden inequities - quite apart from its difficulty for everyone due to unfamiliarity. An equally fair, but much more practical and realistic system would borrow linguistic features from as wide a variety of languages as possible, perhaps to some extent on a population pro rata basis. There would then be a certain amount of give and take. For instance, those who had to master a quite alien script for the IAL might see a relatively large proportion of their grammar and/or vocabulary incorporated into it, and so on.

8: Would it be possible to guess what kind of IAL the international committee might select?

They might

well operate within certain established norms endorsed by many IALers, as by others with an interest in the subject. These include:

(a) alphabetic

script - logographic scripts take many times longer to learn

(b)

orthographic script - one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds with no duplicated or silent letters

(c) regular

grammar, with the simplest possible rules, and no exceptions

(d) no

linguistic genders

(e) an

international vocabulary - with the eventual goal of words from as many languages as possible

(f) no

synonyms - only one word or name for each thing

9: Does the World Language Program have any additional preferences?

Only one at

this early stage: an IAL Hierarchy - which from the practical viewpoint is the gradual introduction of a single IAL in stages. An IAL Hierarchy addresses the problem of universal acceptability. A median IAL, pitched somewhere between the usages of the various national languages, and between linguists and non-linguists, might purport to do this but actually discriminates against those at the extremities. Although suiting those towards the middle, it might well be regarded with suspicion as too easy by one part of the population, and with trepidation as too difficult by another part.

Orwell's

"Newspeak", probably based on his perception of Esperanto and Basic English, is an old chestnut that might be brought out by way of illustration. Orwell's inference that an imposed IAL might be used to limit the thought and expression of speakers of more complex languages evidently struck a chord with his readers - unless it is purely coincidental, and related only to the ascendancy of the English language, that both Esperanto and Basic English have declined so much since his book was published.

On the other

hand, a median IAL such as Esperanto is beyond the capacity of many non-linguists, particularly those whose own languages have a very different or more restricted grammatical structure or sound system. Certainly, speakers of creoles and some Asian tongues have found Esperanto very difficult. Many English speakers have also found Esperanto challenging, since it uses grammatical constructions that English manages without, apart from vestigially.

The two

alternatives to a median IAL have, of course, been an advanced IAL and a basic IAL: Schleyer's "Volapuk" and Hogben's "Interglossa" (forerunner to "Glosa") are respective examples. However, for the reasons mentioned, neither of these IALs would now be acceptable. The inadequacies of Volapuk became evident when people tried to use it in everyday conversation; it obviously lacked a basic version. Conversely Interglossa, with its three tenses and absence of inflections, was in many ways an ideal IAL - though its lack of expandability was a fatal drawback. No current IAL is expandable or contractable: that is the problem with all of them.

Any language taught to children begins with "infant-speak". Those transmitting the language to the very young instinctively employ the simplest grammar, the easiest speech sounds and the shortest words, often internally repetitive. However, the "infant-speak" is really the same language as that used by adults, as are the other gradations and variations.

The essential problem with IALs at the present time is that none of them have a "infant-speak" version and an advanced version and all the versions in between. For practical reasons, it's necessary to start with an "infant-speak" as the official IAL, whilst the other IALs in the hierarchy are developed in the background. At the requisite time, when all (or nearly all) peoples have attained the next level as a result of cultural and linguistic development, the second IAL on the hierarchy (which many if not most people in the world would already be using unofficially) would be designated as the official IAL, and so on. Thus the IAL hierarchy is really a single IAL, introduced in stages.

The table below, reproduced for illustrative rather than prophetic purposes, shows the kind of scheme the World Language Program has in mind. For mnemonic purposes, the number of consonants and vowels accords with the year of introduction. Thus Lang25, with 25 phonemes in its sound system - 20 consonants and 05 vowels - would be introduced in the year 2005 AD.

Lang25 would have an alphabetic script (possibly English-type, without diacritics), a very basic grammar (possibly Chinese-type, word-order based, wholly analytic), and the core vocabulary without consonant clusters etc. would be limited to the twenty most universal consonants identified by the UPSID survey and the five vowels (a, e, i, o, u) which most languages employ, and to which Spanish, Japanese

and other tongues are restricted.

Perhaps the year 2005, at least, will be prophetic since the beginning of the construction of the World Language Program Universal Language Institute at Horning's Mills, Ontario, Canada is scheduled for that year (more photos here).

Provisional
IAL Name

Number of
Consonants in the Vocabulary

Number of
Vowels in the Vocabulary

Inaugural Year
as Official IAL

First Language
or Mother Tongue

Second or
Auxiliary Language

Lang53

27

26

2726 AD

100%

0%

Lang49

26

23

2623 AD

98%

2%

Lang45

25

20

2520 AD

90%

10%

Lang41

24

17

2417 AD

70%

30%

Lang37

23

14

2314 AD

30%

70%

Lang33

22

11

2211 AD

10%

90%

Lang29

21

8

2108 AD

2%

98%

Lang25

20

5

2005 AD

0%

100%

Will the coming
IAL and script be like this - you decide!

Created
by a globally representative congress or committee

Promoted
in a co-ordinated manner by schools and education systems worldwide

SCRIPT

Alphabetic script
is much easier for children than logographic, pictographic etc.

Roman alphabetic
script is dominant worldwide; English script without diacritics is
its fullest and simplest expression.

DIRECTION

Left-to-right
script is dominant worldwide - perhaps because it is more ergonomic
for right-handed scribes.

Bi-directional
script is possibly more politically correct - and also more
ergonomic / economic for printing machinery!

ORTHOGRAPHY

Regular phonemic
orthography: one-to-one sound to symbol correspondence

It has been
demonstrated that a regular phonemic orthography tends to eliminate dyslexia

GRAMMAR

Regularised
grammar with the simplest possible rules and no exceptions

Globally
dominant subject-verb-object syntax and no linguistic genders

VOCABULARY

An international
vocabulary - words from all languages

No exact synonyms
- only one word or name for each thing

HIERARCHY

Continuum

between Chinese-style analytic grammar with strict word order and complex synthetic grammar

Continuum

between core vocabulary of words with near-universal phonology and unrestricted vocabulary / phonology including diacritics

ADVANCED

Consonantal script

not unlike the system in Hebrew, Arabic & Farsi

Global standard

pronunciation - for exact orthographic calibration

LangX - A Hierarchy of IALs

Provisional IAL Name

Number of Consonants and Vowels

Inaugural Year as Official IAL

First Language or Mother Tongue

Second or Auxiliary Language

Lang53

27

C 26 V

2726 AD

100%

0%

Lang49

26

C 23 V

2623 AD

98%

2%

Lang45

25

C 20 V

2520 AD

90%

10%

Lang41

24

C 17 V

2417 AD

70%

30%

Lang37

23

C 14 V

2314 AD

30%

70%

Lang33

22

C 11 V

2211 AD

10%

90%

Lang29

21

C 8 V

2108 AD

2%

98%

Lang25

20

C 5 V

2005 AD

0%

100%

LangX is a hierarchy of IALs, each one of which contains the phonetic and grammatical attributes of those below it. Alternatively, it might be regarded as stages in the projected development of a single IAL. The above table is intended to be illustrative rather than prophetic

- but who knows!

The Initial IAL Must Be Very Simple

A major challenge to the concept of a single IAL is that the peoples of the world speak different grades and types of language. For instance, some pidgins and creoles have a very basic grammar and a sparse spectrum of speech sounds, whereas other languages used by peoples at similar levels of material civilisation employ advanced grammars and phonologies. In like contrast, Chinese and some other Asian languages use elementary analytic grammar, whereas Western tongues tend to be highly inflected and synthetic.

The essential point to bear in mind, when considering a response to this challenge, is that the IAL will be the only language required to be taught in schools world-wide in addition to the mother-tongue. Hence it will be learned by millions of children who not only speak a relatively elementary mother-tongue but are themselves of that significant proportion of students everywhere who are non-linguists. For this reason alone the IAL must begin at a very elementary level.

Professor Hogben's Interglossa (1943), with its three tenses and absence of inflections, was a very suitable candidate. He and his successors may not have selected quite the optimum phonology / vocabulary but the original grammar was easy enough to be mastered by all non-linguists. A recent update of Interglossa's successor, Glosa, is likewise excellent - but possibly goes a bit beyond the minimal grammar necessary for the initial IAL.

An IAL Hierarchy

To begin with, the IAL will be a pure auxiliary, used solely for communication between rather than within cultures. But will this situation last? Will the peoples of the world be content to speak and write to one another on a second-hand basis ad infinitum? The barriers of race, nationality, politics and religion are gradually being subsumed into the greater whole - why should linguistic apartheid necessarily remain?

The initial IAL might fairly accurately be described as a global pidgin. But the signal fact about pidgins is that they eventually either fall into disuse or become creolised as the rising generation spontaneously develops vocabulary and grammar whilst learning these trading lingoes as mother-tongues. Why should the IAL be any different? Sure, everyone will learn the IAL as an auxiliary to begin with, but it is hardly conceivable that some of the next generation will not learn it as their mother-tongue.

Those peoples, families and individuals who move around the world, who no longer have roots more or less exclusively in one national culture, are likely to include those who expand and develop the IAL

in this way. Additionally, primary creative impetus will enter the IAL as orators, writers, film-makers, advertisers etc. use it directly in order to address a global market. This theme is elaborated upon in the first chapters of LANGO, in "Some General Observations", and elsewhere via the links below.

The IAL must be expansible to allow for this development, whilst retaining unity of focus. Hence, whilst Lang25 were the Official IAL (in this proposed scheme), Lang29, Lang33 etc., each with a greater phonology and vocabulary and more sophisticated grammar than the last, would be perfected in practice. Then, in due time, Lang29 - which would have incorporated all of Lang25 in an expanded and more economical format - would be adopted as the new Official IAL (though Lang25 would continue to be comprehensible), and so on.

So far as grammar is concerned, the likely progress up the hierarchy would be from the entirely analytic (no inflections) with Subject-Verb-Object syntax to the highly synthetic (infix, agglutination etc.) with variable syntax. Since advanced polysynthetic grammar is essentially no more than the agglutination of elementary "spread out" grammar there is no reason why the grammatical hierarchy shouldn't be as much a seamless gradation or continuum as the phonetic.

Eventually the best features of all languages, whether "natural" or "constructed", would be incorporated into the hierarchy, according to their linguistic level. Using the English alphabet, a phonemic constraint would appear with Lang53, though the process might be continued with diacritics (unless a completely new script were adopted at some point).

It might well be asked why only one level of the hierarchy should be the Official IAL at any time. Why shouldn't the IAL be split into graded but congruent levels for different peoples and purposes, all of them being equally valid, and hence "Official"?

The danger, I think, is that in the present world - where educational opportunities are so far from universal - the result would be a "vertical" split into "class languages" just as invidious as the "horizontal" division into national and ethnic tongues that presently obtains. For the sake of linguistic unity, therefore, the "Official IAL" should better remain with the generality of non-linguists - only moving up a gear when the grammatical / phonetic / lexical transition had already become a fait accompli in mass usage.

Lang25
- The Inaugural IAL

Some

suggestions for the internationally-representative committee who will form the IAL:

[1] English

script, probably without diacritics - the most widespread script, long-tested for handwriting and configured into most typewriting hardware. Bi-directional script as a possible introduction via child education.

[2] The

variety of phonemes is such that not one is present in all the world's existing languages. A suggested compromise phonology for Lang25 would consist of the 20 consonants identified by the UPSID survey and the 5 vowels found in Spanish, Japanese and other tongues. It so happens that the most universal words for things within the common experience of the whole of humanity tend to fall within this phonetic range. Further discussion at LangX Vocabulary.

UPSID

was a phonological inventory of 317 languages published in 1984 by researchers at the University of California. Examination of the selected tongues, each one representative of a different recognised language family grouping, showed the following 20 to be the commonest consonant phonemes:

The IPA fonts for viewing these character sets are downloadable from this site. However, the IPA characters might not display properly in Internet Explorer, even if you have installed the correct font set. We recommend using Netscape, Firefox, Opera, or Safari (for Mac) to view this page.

p, b

t, d

ʧ

k, g

ʔ

f

s

ʃ

m

n

ɲ

ŋ

w

l, r

j

h

Most

languages have 14 - 16 of these consonants. Also the five vowels [a e i o u] are nearly universal.

All

the consonants are found in the table below, reproduced from Lang53 Orthography. Lang25 might avoid a consonantal script by using five of the seven "spare" consonants as vowels.

CONSONANTS

a

ð

the, this

b

b

ban, bib

c

ʦ

once, cancel

d

d

den, rod

e

ʧ

church, cello

f

f

far, fun

g

ǰ

gel, giant

h

h

hat, hen

i

ŋ

anger, wing

j

ʒ

beige, azure

k

k

cat, like

l

l

cool, leaf

m

m

met, hum

n

n

ten, nun

o

θ

thin, theatre

p

p

pit, up

q

g

tag, go

r

ɾ

ran, rib

s

s

sad, so

t

t

tab, it

u

ɲ

union, canyon

v

v

valve, hive

w

w

win, wool

x

ʃ

she, fish

y

j

yet, young

z

z

zip, daze

,

ʔ

a lo'a bu'a

[3] As for the grammar, we should look to the IAL's priorities. To begin with, the IAL will mainly be used for essential international communication. It will be a true auxiliary language - mostly limited to and focused upon practical necessities. As such, its grammar might well be initially based on the pidgin or Interglossa (original Glosa) model - strict word-order, three tenses and no inflections. The opening phase of the IAL might also be regarded as a global pidgin in terms of its chiefly mundane concerns, and like these utilitarian tongues, which are designed for real-time situations where context provides physical subjects and objects and most of the action, it will require hardly any grammar.

[4] An international committee or convention to formulate the initial IAL in 2005 AD - impossible?

LangX

Vocabulary

SIL Encore IPA

fonts - including SIL

Doulos IPA 93

- are downloadable from this
site.)

To

raise the question of a vocabulary for LangX is first to ask what an IAL is for. The answer, of course, is to communicate internationally. As a consequence, an IAL must differ fundamentally from those languages or dialects which may appear to exist only to reinforce circumscribed cultures, and identify or exclude outsiders through the operation of shibboleths, irregular orthography and grammatical minefields. The rule of law in the realms of grammar, orthography and vocabulary is therefore as essential to an IAL as the principle of economy, but should not require a lowest common denominator approach that also restricts the scope of dialogue. The ideal solution is itself a dilemma: a linguistic continuum or hierarchy, embracing words of varying semantic and phonological difficulty, and allowing users to select their level of discourse. Hence, they might choose one-clause utterances containing only words with the easiest and commonest international speech sounds, or at the other extreme, complex sentences interweaving words transliterated from any tongue, living or dead, organic or constructed, commensurate only with the linguistic capacity of LangX's grammar and orthography, and of the participants in the discussion.

Since

the memorising of words is the most difficult and time-consuming aspect of learning a language, vocabulary-design is the weightiest part of creating one, though possibly the least onerous. Moreover, it is a task well beyond the individual author, so at this stage it would be invidious to place any restriction upon vocabulary - with the exception of words with phonetic qualities that cannot be denoted by a limited 53-phoneme spelling system.

Neologism,

which requires a sense of euphony as well as an understanding of etymology, is a difficult art best practiced by the artless. Even its geniuses - Bullokar, Shakespeare etc. - coined many failures. In the modern age neologism has become universal in more ways than one, through the globalisation of religion, science, literacy, culture and brand names. Quite often, new words and names are accepted into many tongues, varying only in accordance with the scripts and orthographies in which they appear. In such cases it should be possible to identify the word in its original or optimal form, for

use in the IAL.

The notion that the IAL's lexicon of common words should contain the most generally acceptable phonemes, rather than consonant clusters and other speech sounds that some of the world's peoples find particularly difficult, found confirmation in UPSID: the phonological inventory of 317 languages published in 1984 by researchers at the University of California. Examination of the selected tongues, each one representative of a different recognised language family grouping, showed the following 20 to be the commonest consonant phonemes:

p,

b

t,

d

ʧ

k,

g

ʔ

f

s

ʃ

m

n

ɲ

ŋ

w

l,

r

j

h

Most

languages have 14 - 16 of these phonemes (the West African language Bambara is closest to the exact complement - it lacks [ʔ]

but has [z]

and [dʒ]).

So this table is a useful guide to the consonant phonemes the commonest words of LangX might contain.

Similarly, some vowels are more universal than others, and these are the ones that should tend to feature in common words.

Synonyms

and near-synonyms present difficulties in most languages - how much more in an IAL which, initially admitting all words from all sources, would be inundated by hundreds or thousands of synonyms and near-synonyms - not to mention umpteen million words! Happily the problem is much less daunting than it might appear at first sight, due to a number of mitigating factors, including the following:

(1)

When most words from most languages can be rendered into the same orthography, most of the world's words will become available to the discriminating speaker or writer, who will then be able to choose the best synonym for a particular purpose - for no reason except its sound. In this way the ideal word might emerge - as it has in the past. (Ultimately, for the sake of simplicity there should be no synonyms within the IAL.)

(2)

A suitable word already existing in a living language should always be chosen in preference to a neologism. The latter might be more logical, etymologically speaking, but only the test of time proves euphony.

(3)

The extant original form of a word should be used rather than transliterated versions in other languages.

(4)

Justice demands that the IAL's vocabulary be selected from all languages. In fact this is not a limitation, since things and ideas tend to originate in different countries - and often the best of them in small nations, within minority tongues. The other side of this coin is the requirement to maximise phonetic range and depth, so as to minimise the number of homographs in an orthographic script.

(5)

It might happen that a word chosen for the IAL eventually failed: perhaps because most people disliked its sound, or its historical associations. However, synonyms would continue to exist in the remaining mother-tongues for centuries, so replacing a word in the IAL should not be too difficult.

(6)

The globalisation of commodities and ideas is not taking place wordlessly. Thus the same processes that have raised one synonym above others within national tongues have begun to work internationally. In this way the best words for the IAL might appear.

(7)

Where synonyms of equivalent pedigree exist, it is probably better to choose the older word, or, where that cannot be established with

certainty, the shorter. In many cases the shorter word, or - more exactly - the word requiring less effort to articulate, will be the older word (Zipf's Law).

(8)

Whereas the IAL is unlikely to borrow Chinese characters for its script, it might adopt the Chinese system of word-formation - as imitated by progressive constructed languages.

(9)

Where it is impossible to choose between alternative words, and a compromise word has failed, it may be necessary to return to first principles. Did Cratylus identify one of these in Plato's eponymous dialogue? He pointed out that rho

is a sign of motion, found in words such as "tremor, tremble, strike, crush, bruise, tremble and whirl" because it is linked to the physical activity of pronunciation. According to Socrates, the tongue was "most agitated and least at rest in the pronunciation of this letter" and therefore it was originally used to express motion. Aspirated phonemes requiring expenditure of breath, likewise find themselves in windy, tempestuous words such as "shivering, seething, shock and shaking". Lamda, with its liquid smoothness produced by the slipping of the tongue, is found in words like "slip, level, floor, flood, sleek" (when combined with another syllable it denotes easy but repetitive motion as in "handle, swivel, anvil, paddle"); gamma, in which the tongue is detained, combines with lamda to express the notion of stickiness, as in "glue, glutinous, glucose".

LANG53

Background

1.

LANGO

2. A Conflict of Brand Names 3. Esperanto & English 4. A New IAL Template

LANGO

An

effective international auxiliary language & script (IAL) is long overdue. Without one there is no alternative to translation, which is more expensive and less precise. International agencies spend £/\$ billions every year on translation, the inadequacies of which have sometimes led to serious gaffes or misunderstandings.

There

is, of course, more to the IAL than the saving of money and misinterpretation at international conferences. As the universal

second language, learned by every schoolchild in addition to the mother-tongue, the IAL would facilitate accurate translation of the world's literature and bring the whole range of modern ideas to every nation through tourism and the media. Moreover, the creative effect of broadcasters, writers, advertisers, film-makers etc. using the IAL to address a global audience would inevitably cause it to develop independently of the mother-tongues, gradually acquiring their best features, and eventually - in the distant future - absorbing them altogether.

As

is well known, there are two theories regarding the IAL: on the one hand, the laissez-faire idea that English (or another existing tongue) will become the de

facto

IAL; and on the other, that an IAL must be consciously-planned and "culturally-neutral" from the start (à la Esperanto).

It's worth noting that these two different routes to the IAL would have to meet up at some point anyway. Any "natural" tongue officially chosen as the IAL would not long survive in a recognisable form, following the inevitable rationalisation of its spelling system and grammatical constructions, and the substitution of most of its vocabulary by words from other languages; and any "artificial" language would be transformed in like manner: the grammar and orthography might be changed less, but even more vocabulary would probably be replaced.

Moreover,

since no major "organic" tongue (including English) exists without a substantial "constructed" element in its make-up - and vice-versa - a full combination of these complements in a viable IAL is obvious. (Could the optimum balance be 50/50, as in the two halves of the brain?) Briefly, both "natural/organic" and "artificial/constructed" elements are necessary for linguistic success.

The

two IAL attempts featured on this site reflect this dichotomy and inter-relationship. LANGO would begin from a single existing language, whereas LangX would start from a judicious mix of the best grammar and vocabulary from many languages. Thus LANGO would be initially derived from the "naturally evolved" speech patterns of English, though subject to careful planning and guidance thereafter; but LangX would be more obviously constructed, though of more or less entirely organic elements.

"LANGO"

by Robert Craig & myself (1996, since revised) was subtitled "a fully democratic approach towards an international auxiliary

language initially based on reformed English". It proposed that a globally-representative committee should guide this potential IAL from the English-speaking world to the whole world - via the simplest grammar, a regularised orthography related to an international standard pronunciation, and the gradual incorporation of words from a variety of tongues.

LANGO

incorporated the idea that grammatical reform must accompany spelling reform: a theory originally (?) promulgated by Professor JYT Greig in his 1928 monograph "Breaking Priscian's Head: English as She will be Spoke and Wrote" (but sadly neglected by English spelling reformers before and since). Greig's treatise seems to have been much influenced by Sylvia Pankhurst's 1927 classic "International Language", in which she demonstrated the superiority of analytic grammar over synthetic for IAL purposes (i.e. the advantage of strict word-order and isolates over free word-order and inflections).

A

Conflict of Brand-Names

After

Prof. Bruce Beach had generously posted LANGO on his World Language Program website, I received an email from a member of the East African LANGO tribe, who claimed that the name LANGO should be reserved for his language (and not without justification - the LANGO people living across a large area of Northern Uganda and Southern Sudan speak three dialects of LWO, one of which is also called LANGO). Our brand-name might have been defensible legally - there being a precedent in Lango du Mondo, an IAL invented by J. de Ria in 1788 - but morally - perhaps not!

There are also

other arguments against LANGO. Firstly, the considerable international opposition to the use of English as the IAL would probably extend to a scheme which even started with English; for the same reasons, it might be difficult to persuade all parties that the international committee appointed to oversee the transition from English to a truly global language would carry out their task as planned. An IAL comprised of grammar and vocabulary from the various languages of the world would avoid this suspicion.

Secondly, the

international prestige of English may have further declined since

LANGO was published. With the almost simultaneous collapse of the communist state apparatus in all countries except China and its satellites, and the apparent victory of American-style capitalism, many serious commentators in the early 1990s were predicting the international triumph of the English language. A decade later the situation is entirely changed: left-wing governments are resurgent across the world and America finds itself in the throes of a severe economic downturn, which may consequently dilute one of the main reasons for foreigners learning English, not to mention an IAL derived from it.

Thirdly, radio

and television greatly helped the spread of the English language, but for mainly financial reasons the Internet may end up doing the opposite. It costs a lot to set up and maintain terrestrial broadcasting media. Generally speaking, only the major languages have provided a sufficiently large market to make the enterprise worthwhile. As we described in Chapter 4 of LANGO, the minority tongues have suffered at the expense of the major languages as a result. Conversely, it costs relatively little to broadcast over the Internet, once the initial marginal purchase of a computer has been made. Indeed, there is plenty of evidence that displaced ethnic minorities, who once had to learn a major language in order to follow media broadcasts, are now largely relying upon Internet newsgroups, radio and TV, broadcast in their own language.

Fourthly, the

rapid growth of electronic communications is a serious drawback to a medium-term scheme such as LANGO. Internet-users are rightly impatient of translation; they want a fully-functional language now. The LANGO approach might be a theoretical possibility, but realpolitik demands an immediate advance by one foot or the other, which is why the only practicable alternatives are an existing language (probably English) and the right "neutral" constructed language.

Esperanto
& English

Dr

Ludwik Zamenhof had the genius to see this over a century ago. However, he somewhat overestimated both the linguistic ability of certain peoples and the capacity or willingness of fledgling international authorities to act - and thereby caught his excellent initiative in a double-bind. In Chapter 5 of LANGO we showed how the revision of Esperanto, and hence the prospect of its international endorsement, has continued to be frustrated by the inviolable terms of Zamenhof's "Fundamento". Esperanto will undoubtedly contribute hugely

to the IAL movement in the future, as it has in the past, but isn't universally acceptable in its present form. In particular, Asians, English-speakers, and various others tend to find the grammar unnecessarily difficult. A number of sites present critiques - Justin B. Rye's being the most comprehensive.

Esperanto's hope remaining unrealised, at least under its current constitution, attention has gone to English by default. Of course, it would be very convenient for us English-speakers if our mother-tongue were adopted by fait accompli, but there are indications - some of which we demonstrated in Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4 of LANGO - that the real influence of English has actually declined over the past half-century - in spite of progress at the expense of French in a number of countries, and the international consolidation of English usage in some specialised fields.

A
New Template for the IAL

It's worth remembering that the IAL will be determined by an officially-appointed global committee. They will form the IAL, perhaps by endorsing a slightly modified "national" tongue or constructed language, perhaps by formulating something almost entirely new. In any event, they will certainly be influenced by existing proposals, so the individual will continue to have an input (Chapter 7 of LANGO).

However, individual or minority endeavours should have recognised limits: attempts to exercise proprietorial rights over language - which is, after all, a public rather than a private phenomenon - have always been detrimental (vide Volapük, Esperanto, the French Academy etc.). But whereas the IAL must be a product of many minds from different cultural traditions, it might still be useful to have an illustrative proto-language to act as a catalyst or vehicle for progressive ideas (and hopefully to give fresh impetus to the IAL movement). In the absence of a satisfactory alternative, LangX is proposed for this role.

It is intended to be a democratic endeavour and, as such, exemplifies the dominant themes or characteristics within international languages: regularised orthography, analytic Chinese-type grammar, English script without diacritics, SVO (Subject-Verb-Object) syntax etc.. Missing from this list would be the consonantal script found in Semitic languages (Hebrew, Arabic etc.). This type of script has

signal advantages which might be fully realised in the IAL, given a truly global vocabulary with a sufficient variety of consonant sequences within words.

LANG53

Orthography

The IPA fonts for viewing these character sets are downloadable from this site. However, the IPA characters might not display properly in Internet Explorer, even if you have installed the correct font set. We recommend using Netscape, Firefox, Opera, or Safari (for Mac) to view this page.

- 1.
- 53 Phonemes
2. A Dual Orthography
3. A Consonantal Script
4. Shorthand

53

Phonemes

An

IAL orthography can only be successful if it reconciles the following facts:

Most

people in the world use no more than about 30 phonemes in their speech, whether or not they speak the standard dialect of their language.

Around

15 phonemes are shared by most languages.

An

IAL which cannot be learned easily and used simply is likely to defeat the resolve of the average student.

The

significant proportion of speakers who habitually employ a relatively extensive phonology and grammar will ultimately reject an IAL which lacks the potential capacity to incorporate the mother-tongues (LANGO Chapter 6).

The

challenge, therefore, is to provide an IAL which can be used in either a simple or a complex manner: in the case of orthography this means common phonemes for common words, but also a gradation to rarer speech sounds as words become more specialised, or specific to particular cultures with certain preferences. Moreover, in order to obtain an exact correspondence between orthography and phonology, it would be necessary to establish a global standard pronunciation (GSP) for reference purposes. Bearing in mind that LANG53 would be international from the start rather than initially English-based, more about a GSP may be found in Chapter 20

of LANGO.

The

53 phoneme orthography offered below - a revision of the scheme in the first part of Chapter 19 of LANGO -

permits most of the more usual speech sounds to be displayed without digraphs:

CONSONANTS

VOWELS

LANG53

a

ð

the, this

A

æ

bad, lack, chat

bAd, lAk, eAt

b

b

ban, bib

B

ɑu

out, bough, crown

Bt, bB, krBn

c

ʦ

once, cancel

C

ə

other, sofa, a

UaC, sGfC, C

d

d

den, rod

D

ɨ

Wbl

(R), cblp (R)

mD, sDr

e

ʧ

church, cello

E

ɛ

bed, well, nyet (R)

bEd, wEl, uEt

f

f

far, fun

F

ɜː

fern, bird, peu (F)

fFn, bFd, pF

g

ǰ

gel, giant

G

ou

foe, know, go

fG, nG, qG

h

h

hat, hen

H

ɪə

dear, seer, weir

dH, sH, wH

i

ŋ

anger, wing

I

ɪ

bid, writ, gin

bId, rIt, gIn

j

ʒ

beige, azure

J

ʊ

put, full, bull

pJt, fJl, bJl

k

k

cat, like

K

ei

veil, day, raid

vKl, dK, rKd

l

l

cool, leaf

L

ɔː

paw, auk, talk

pL, Lk, tLk

m

m

met, hum

M

ɑː

car, rather, path

kM, rMaC, pMo

n

n

ten, nun

N

i:

bee, key, pizza

bN, kN, pNcC

o

θ

thin, theatre

O

ʋ

pod, frost, thong

pOd, frOst, oOi

p

p

pit, up

P

ʊə

poor, book, lure

pP, bPk, lP

q

g

tag, go

Q

ɔə

pore, boar, lore

pQ, bQ, lQ

r

ɾ

ran, rib

R

ɛə

fair, wear, mare

fR, wR, mR

s

s

sad, so

S

ø

coeur (F), hören (G)

kSr, hSrCn

t

t

tab, it

T

ɔi

boil, toy, koi

bTl, tT, kT

u

ɲ

union, canyon

U

ʌ

bud, worry, jug

bUd, wUrI, gUq

v

v

valve, hive

V

aiə

fire, ire, mire

fV, V, mV

w

w

win, wool

W

ɑuə

tower, power

tW, pW

x

ʃ

she, fish

X

u:

flue, do, boot

fIX, dX, bXt

y

j

yet, young

Y

y

tu, mur (F), für (G)

tY, mYr, fYr

z

z

zip, daze

Z

ai

lie, why, knight

lZ, wZ, nZt

,

ʔ

a lo'a bu'a

The

above vowel representations are more or less arbitrary but the consonant symbols might be rationalised to some extent: 19 are as in English (and many other languages), whether as the sole usage, e.g. [b], [d], or as one of two or more alternatives, e.g. [c], [g]; two are used as in languages other than English - [j] as in French, Portuguese, Catalan and Romanian and [x] as in Portuguese, Basque, Catalan and Maltese; [q] ~ / g / may be unprecedented but fits morphologically; this leaves [a e i o u], which have been allocated with some reference to

the corresponding I.P.A. symbol, thus [a] ~ / D
 /, [e] ~ / tS
 / ([c] ~ / tþs
 / + / h /),
 [i] ~ / N
 / (the participle
 "-ing" suffix might be mnemonic
 here), < o > ~ / T
 / and finally [u] ~
 upside-down / J /
 (!?).

The
 initial core vocabulary of common words would employ many fewer than
 53 phonemes, and as few consonant clusters as possible; words
 containing rarer and more difficult speech sounds might be added
 later, as the IAL developed. A relatively extensive phonology would
 permit all words of most languages, and most words of nearly all
 languages, to be transliterated - with the result that most
 utterances from most cultures could be made under the banner of the
 IAL and written down in its script, though this could not be done
 adequately without some grammatical development.

The
 above scheme may require fundamental modification in due course: its
 anglicised phonology - including the 23 vowels of (non-rhotic) R.P.
 English and only 3 exclusively heard in other tongues - is perhaps
 too biased towards English for a universal language. Robert Craig has
 suggested an alternative allocation of symbols to phonemes, as follows:

CONSONANTS

VOWELS

LANG53

a

ð

the, this

A

ə

other, sofa, a

CaA, sOfA, A

b

b

ban, bib

B

ʊə

poor, book, lure

pB, bBk, lB

c

ʧ

church, cello

C

ʌ

bud, worry, jug

bCd, wCrI, iCq

d

d

den, rod

D

ʋ

pod, frost, thong

pDd, frDst, oDg

e

ʦ

once, cancel

E

ɛ

bed, well, nyet (R)

bEd, wEl, uEt

f

f

far, fun

F

ɛə

fair, wear, mare

fF, wF, mF

g

ŋ

anger, wing

G

ɑu

out, bough, crown

Gt, bG, krGn

h

h

hat, hen

H

iː

bee, key, pizza

bH, kH, pHeA

i

ǰ

gel, giant

I

ɪ

bid, writ, gin

bId, rIt, iIn

j

ʒ

beige, azure

J

ɨ

Wbl (R),

cblp (R)

mJ, sJr

k

k

cat, like

K

aiə

dear, seer, weir

dK, sK, wK

l

l

cool, leaf

L

y

fire, ire, mire

fL, L, mL

m

m

met, hum

M

ɔː
paw, auk, talk
pM, Mk, tMk

n

n
ten, nun

N

ɪə
tu, mur (F), für (G)
tN, mNr, fNr

o

θ
thin, theatre

O

ou
foe, know, go
fO, nO, qO

p

p
pit, up

P

ɔi
boil, toy, koi
bPl, tP, kP

q

g
tag, go

Q

ɔə
pore, boar, lore
pQ, bQ, lQ

r

r
ran, rib

R

ɑː
car, rather, path
kR, rRaA, pRo

s

s

sad, so

S

ø

coeur (F), hören (G)

kS, hSrAn

t

t

tab, it

T

ai

lie, why, knight

lT, wT, nTt

u

ɲ

union, canyon

U

uː

flue, do, boot

flU, dU, bUt

v

v

valve, hive

V

ʊ

put, full, bull

pVt, fVl, bVl

w

w

win, wool

W

ɑuə

tower, power

tW, pW

x

ʃ

she, fish

X

æ
bad, lack, chat
bXd, lXk, cXt

y
j
yet, young

Y
ei
veil, day, raid
vYl, dY, rYd

z
z
zip, daze

Z
ɜː
fern, bird, peu (F)
fZn, bZd, pZ

!
ʔ
a lo'a bu'a

A
Dual Orthography

The
"dual orthography", using English lower-case letters for
consonants and upper-case for vowels (as shown in the right-hand
columns of the above tables), is widely disliked, as those who have
tried it in English spelling reform schemes have discovered. People
tend to find it aesthetically objectionable, inimical to cursive
handwriting, and very awkward for typists - who must continually
operate the shift-key.

However,
a system analogous to that found in Hebrew, Arabic and other Semitic
languages would make the vowels or capital letters invisible in most
circumstances. For instance, in the Hebrew Nikud system the
diacritics or marks that signify vowels are normally omitted from the
text of books and newspapers; the vowel points are only shown where a
guide to the pronunciation of an unfamiliar word is required.
Children memorise the vowels and learn to recognise words by their
consonants alone. Using essentially the same system, the
"adult" script of LANG53 would be similar to the script on
this page.

A

Consonantal Script

The

potential print-saving achievable by a consonantal script is astounding. With 27 consonants, 551,880 words of four letters or less are possible ($27 + [27 \times 27 =] 729 + [27 \times 729 =] 19,683 + [27 \times 19,683 =] 531,441 = 551,880$) - four or five times more than the total vocabulary of English (if the endless progression of names for numbers, chemical compounds etc. is excluded).

However,

this very brevity tends to produce homographs. For example, it can be seen that the following English words: "rat, rate, rait, ret, rete, writ, rit, (ritt,) write, rite, right, wright, rot, root, route, (wroot,) (rought,) wrote, rote, rut, rout, wrought" would all become "rt" in a consonantal script! The three-consonant word-roots typical of consonant-based scripts such as Hebrew are probably a response to this homographic tendency, given the limited number of possible consonant sequences in these tongues.

The

need to reduce homography in its consonantal script is one reason why LangX's vocabulary should be incorporated from the entire range of the world's languages. Even then, many potential consonant sequences would probably remain unused - simply because they do not occur in the vocabulary of any existing language. Moreover, artificial neologisms containing unprecedented sequences might prove unpopular.

Shorthand

A

shorthand convention might circumvent this difficulty by employing "spare" consonant sequences. Shorthand systems using English letters are not unknown. For instance, PitmanScript has: "of ~ v, to ~ t, be ~ b, you ~ u, not ~ n, we ~ w, me ~ m, do ~ d".

A

shorthand system for LangX might specify:

Words

of one or two consonants may be shorthand or conventional spellings.

Words

of three or more consonants are always orthographically regular.

Mathematically,

there would be a maximum of 756 ($27 + [27 \times 27]$) words, abbreviations or logograms in the first category and an unlimited number of words in the second. However, this would be no guide to the frequency of words on the page. For instance, the following 69 words make up about 50% of all average continuous running English, spoken

or written: "the, of, and, to, a, in, that, it, is, I, for, be,
was, as, you, with, he, on, have, by, not, at, this, are, we, his,
but, they, all, or, which, will, from, had, has, one, our, an, been,
no, their, there, were, so, my, if, me, what, would, who, when, him,
them, her, your, any, more, now, its, time, up, do, out, can, than,
only, she, made, us."

Reginald

J G Dutton, FRSA, author of Dutton

World Speedwords, was evidently thinking along similar lines
several decades ago. Here is his shorthand for some common words:

a

at, to

b

but

c

this

d

of, from

e

am, are, is (to) be

f

for

g

them, they

h

has, have

i

in

j

I, me

k

that

l

the

m

with

n

no, not

o

on

p

can

q

interrogative

r

will

s

he

t

it

u

a, an, one

v

you

w

us, we

x

if

y

was, were

z

as

Lang29 Grammar

1.

Synthetic Grammar 2. Analytic Grammar

3. Minimal Grammar 4. Lang29

Grammar

Synthetic
Grammar

Greek,

Latin, Arabic and French - major IALs up until recent times - have grammars which employ affixes rather than fixed word order, i.e. they are synthetic rather than analytic. Synthetic grammar is more complex, and can be impenetrable, but it does have the ability to reduce speech and text-length - since affixed words effectively contain a phrase or clause within themselves.

The

decline of these great languages as IALs is related to the spread of universal education and literacy. In days when education was highly selective, an ability to cope with classical languages and synthetic grammar was par for the course. The organised movement to reform English spelling accompanied the advent of mass education for much the same reason (LANGO Chapter 9).

Compactness

is a benefit of synthetic grammar, but also a potential drawback; the abbreviation of a word into an affix - e.g. "I did jump ~ I jump did ~ I jumpdid ~ I jumped" - makes the grammar harder to analyse, and less accessible to non-linguists. Synthetic grammar is further complicated by clumsy attempts at spelling reform, which paint over the verbal origin of affixes. Orthographic revision can also obscure the etymology of stand-alone words, but it normally maintains their integrity as grammatical markers.

In

other words, the principles of synthetic grammar and orthographic regularity can conflict. We demonstrated this in Chapter 18 of LANGO: "For example, "talked, edited, banned" are grammatically regular on the page, but in speech they tend to be "taukt or tokt, editid, band", likewise "banks, cats, dogs, foxes" usually become "banks, kats, dogz, foksiz"." English inflections being the irregular factor in this case, we proposed that they might be replaced, either by less phonetically mutable inflections or by the kind of rigid-word-order inflectionless constructions typical of pidgins and creoles.

Analytic
Grammar

Analytic

grammar facilitates the laboriously learnt second-language, painfully acquired in isolation or small groups, much more than the

mother-tongue absorbed amid the varied life of a speech community; the analytic sentence parses itself for the benefit of the busy or discouraged student. Another important consideration is that those with a synthetic mother-tongue can easily understand analytic grammar, but not vice-versa. For such reasons alone, analytic grammar would probably be best for LangX, at least in its initial stages. Also, it would be difficult to inaugurate a consonantal script using synthetic grammar, and quite impossible if vowel inflections were used. However, the kind of consonantal script proposed on the Lang53 Orthography page - using shorthand or conventional forms - could doubtless be made to work with analytic grammar.

Analytic

grammar is synthetic grammar at an earlier stage of development. It is more verbose, of course, but the parts of speech which constitute grammar are clearly shown. The analysis may then be synthesised, simply by turning auxiliary verbs, cases, prepositions, articles etc. into inflections. The reverse process - converting synthetic grammar into analytic - is more difficult because many affixes are no longer recognisable as words; even so, it has evidently happened in the past - in the 12th Century, for instance, English changed from Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) to Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) syntax and lost most of its inflections.

The

subsequent success of the English language is not unconnected from the fact that SVO syntax far outstrips SOV in global population terms, though each is used by about 40% of all languages. Of the remaining languages, about 15% use VSO, and the remainder VOS, OVS and OSV. This evidence might suggest that LangX should employ SVO syntax.

Minimal Grammar

In

English, the millennial dominance of word-order based analytic grammar has rendered superfluous all noun inflections except the possessive, as well as adjectival agreement etc.. In Chapter 14 of LANGO we showed how English-based Caribbean creoles have pushed the word order principle harder in order to achieve further economies.

Moreover,

there is another factor at work, complementary to the word-order principle. This is the grammar of context itself: where a thing is immediately obvious there is no need to define the subject (article, noun etc.) in terms of relationship or action (verb, adverb) with or towards the object (preposition, adjective, noun etc.). In other words, there is no need for parts of speech, never mind grammar - whether analytic or synthetic.

This

phenomenon is not exclusive to the creoles, of course. In the work-places, streets and homes of more or less any language community many people - particularly those who know one another and each one's circumstances well enough - tend to speak in ellipsis. The sentence - the complete statement or question - is there, but it is conveyed in one or two words or phrases; the rest of the words are understood.

The

abbreviation also extends to the word classes themselves in some languages. Some do not have a noun, as such; instead of "tree" they might say "it trees"; and word order alone may determine whether the adjectival or adverbial sense is meant, e.g. in creole:

"he

walk silent; she sing soft"

(Obviously,

the position of the adjective and adverb in the sentence would have to be strictly defined. Typical creole usage has the adjective before the noun and the adverb after the verb. This also seems to be the predominant order among languages worldwide.)

One

of the main defects of Esperanto was that it formalised words into classes or parts of speech. Even in English there are hundreds of words which may be used without variance in two or more classes: "under, head, right, love, dog etc."

As

for noun case suffixes, we English-speakers may pride ourselves that word-order has rendered most of them unnecessary, and jibe at the accusative ending and adjectival agreement in Esperanto - perhaps oblivious to the fact that creole users might regard our genitive or possessive inflection in a similar way. Thus a creole speaker might say:

"this

woman money stolen; that village corn ripe".

It

might sound strange to us, but the context determines whether the meaning is possessive or descriptive. Is the genitive inflection essential? If not, we should consider losing it in the initial stages of LangX. In any case, analytic grammar would demand a preposition - if absolutely necessary - (as in French etc., but used only as required) rather than an inflection. Other languages also omit the genitive, e.g. Welsh:

"llyfr

John, llyfr coch" "John's book, red book".

The
creoles also tend to drop the plural inflection, e.g.:

"two
house; them rabbit"

So
does Chinese; also English - for items regarded as game rather than
as individuals, e.g. "sheep, deer, cod, grouse, Portuguese,
Swiss etc." However, most languages employ a plural inflection
(often [-s]). It's not difficult to see why. The plural is a useful
device. For example, 10 kg of stone, wood or oil is very different
from 10 kg of stones, woods or oils. The numeral quantifies; the
plural diversifies.

The
analytic approach would employ auxiliary markers, such as Chinese
"xie" ["some"] and the French singular and plural
definite articles "le" or "la", and
"les" (gender in the linguistic sense being banned in
LangX, of course).

Some
languages are more advanced than others in terms of economical
expression or succinct syntax. Chinese grammar is exemplary in this
regard, not least in its approach to word formation.

The
creole approach to negation is likewise economical:

"he
no work today"

Old
English used the same construction, with the prefix "ne-"
for "no", exactly as in Scottish English, Russian and other
languages. English uses "never" in a similar way.

Creoles
tend to drop the copula between subject and predicate:

"the
sun hot; he old man; them hungry; why you bring this?"

This
too is common - e.g. Russian "he engineer" - and might be
adopted at least in the initial stages of LangX.

Creoles
also tend to use serial verbs:

"she
go try find it; he start run escape"

The infinitive is understood. English often does the same, e.g. "Let my people go!; I heard you call; I watched her paint a picture; he felt a hand touch him" - cf. Shakespeare's old-fashioned "Tranio! I saw her coral lips to move." Another one for Lang29?

As for recursion, creoles tend to use discrete one-clause sentences and anaphora, rather than embedded clauses headed by correlatives. We used the following example in LANGO:

"Man plough. He my brother." "The man (who is) ploughing is my brother."

The complex construction can, of course, be used outside the immediate context. It could be commentary on a video. However the simplest form of recursion is perfectly functional, and might well be the better alternative for Lang29.

Creoles use few tenses or verb inflections. Chinese is the same. As always, context is the key. In Lang29, at least, there would certainly be a case for keeping all verb stems invariant, i.e. without inflections, and relying upon auxiliaries to change the tense.

Prosody is rather a non-issue in creoles. They are fast-growing IALs largely because they are easy. Naturally, the prevailing prosody of a culture may be syllable-timed, or stress-timed in a particular fashion, and speakers moderate their intonation accordingly in order to be better understood, but they do not seek to place an extra burden on the listener.

The interrogative might also be mentioned in this preliminary sketch. One extra word added at the start of the sentence - such as Esperanto's [tSu:] - is probably quite sufficient to turn a statement into a question.

Finally, from all these considerations we might arrive at a conclusion re the relationship between the different levels or degrees of grammar. It might be expressed as follows:

no grammar » minimal grammar » analytic grammar » synthetic grammar

As

we have seen, synthetic grammar is the most technically advanced, but isn't compatible with a minimal grammar which doesn't require parts of speech to be defined.

In

any case, LangX will be an auxiliary language for a very long time, i.e. generations or centuries. There will be no need, in the foreseeable future, for it to compete with the advanced grammar of certain mother-tongues. Analytic grammar will be quite sufficient.

Lang29

Grammar

These

provisional (and still very incomplete) conclusions re the right grammar for Lang29 might be summarised:

analytic

grammar - strict word order - SVO syntax

no

case inflections, i.e. no genitive or plural noun inflections

no

verb declension or inflection, including imperative/infinitive

all

tenses/moods/voices shown by auxiliaries

no

word class inflections: noun, verb stem, adjective and adverb are identical

adjective(s)

always precede noun; adverb(s) always follow verb

maximum

succinctness in grammar and word-formation

form

of negation and omission of copula

use

of anaphora rather than correlatives for recursion

no

rules re prosody: users of an IAL should strive only to be heard

single

head-word for interrogative

Contact,

Comment & Criticism

First

published 29 February 2000; 9th Edition 18 February 2001; 10th

Edition 31 August 2001.

Your
comments and criticisms are welcomed - please email
Antony Alexander, who would like to
acknowledge the assistance of Robert Craig (my co-author on
"LANGO" - [qv here](#)) in the early
stages of this new project.

Some
Relevant IAL Links

LOGLAN

LOJBAN

CEQLI

RAP

LIN RIE

aUI

GILO

Essays on Language Design

Design of
an Optimal IAL

Principles
of Language Planning

How to Build a Language

Richard
Kennaway's links

International
Phonetic Assoc.

Language Construction Kit

James
Chandler's IAL page

UCL
Linguistics & Phonetics

Want
a change from IAL and language sites? Why not try:

Skolnick's
Report GATA Worldwatch RENSE
Bahá'í
World Center

Some Observations about the International Auxiliary Language

The following

"thread" resulted from a message posted on 21/1/01 at the
Deja newsgroup "alt.language.artificial" under the title
"Some General Observations regarding the IAL":

[1] 21/1/01 Antony Alexander

The IAL will begin as an auxiliary, an international pidgin, the only language children in every country will be required to learn at school in addition to the mother-tongue. However, even as pidgins sooner or later become creolised or fade away, the IAL - not permitted the latter option - will eventually take on a life of its own as authors, advertisers, film-makers etc. use it directly to address the global market-place. The end result of this process will be a single global tongue.

The IAL will develop in two phases. It will begin as no more than a universal second-language; its grammar will be simple and entirely regular (and probably analytic, with SVO syntax and rigid word-order); its vocabulary will be chosen from existing languages according to the most popular phonology (probably no more than about 20 consonants and 10 vowels); and in all likelihood it will have neither consonant clusters, nor diacritics, nor rules regarding prosody.

The IAL will be formed by an internationally representative congress. Anyone who doubts this - except from conviction that English will become the de facto IAL - has underestimated the politicisation surrounding this issue. We should be certain that the initial composition of the IAL will be very much determined by the need for universal acceptance. For instance, English-speakers will be unwilling to accept Esperanto's level of grammar, as will many Asian peoples. In fact a European-based IAL is now out of the question. The rise of Middle-Eastern and East Asian countries towards economic parity with the West is not without consequence. The Chinese rate of development, if projected onward from the past quarter-century, would enable that nation to surpass all others within a few decades. If a compromise IAL is not implemented soon, schoolchildren two generations hence might be required to spend months learning Chinese characters, rather than a far more logical and assimilable alphabetic script (the inferiority of Chinese script is compensated by superior aspects in Chinese grammar, vocabulary and word-formation).

The same applies to phonology (and hence vocabulary). The international committee formulating the IAL will have to take into account both the speech preferences of various nations and the need to promote a unified and coherent system. They will have to steer a middle way between the lowest common denominator tendency, which

would jettison all but the few phonemes that all nations can accept unreservedly, and the highest common factor tendency which would argue that children possess the inherent capacity to master unfamiliar phonemes, and might easily do so but for nationalist education and class acculturation.

Briefly, neither too simple nor too complex an IAL would be countenanced, whatever reason be given. A compromise will have to be found between the extremes. But this won't mean an absolutely equitable outcome. Inevitably, the IAL will be easier for some than for others. There is no way around this. No compromise could possibly suit everyone, and in some things compromise is impossible. Take script, for instance. Script normally reads from left to right, or from right to left. One or other of these directions must be chosen - both at once would be disastrous! Similarly, alphabetic script does not mix with certain kinds of logographic, ideographic and pictographic script.

It's not unlikely that the IAL will start with English script, without diacritics. Peoples whose script goes from right to left, isn't Roman, or isn't even alphabetic, will find this a challenge. They will have to be compensated, in all fairness, probably by getting an extra dose of familiar vocabulary and/or grammar. Nations with a relatively large phonology will have few problems with the initial IAL vocabulary, but those with a narrower - though probably more allophonic - range of speech sounds will find many common words difficult to pronounce correctly, in spite of the best efforts of the international committee. SVO syntax - probably the front-runner at present - is hard for those habituated to one of the other five basic syntactic structures, and so on.

Peoples differ widely in their political, social and linguistic advancement. Anyone who doesn't believe this should travel more. The consequence of this essential fact is that the IAL will have to remain fixed, subject to the repair of any obvious defects, until the more linguistically backward sections of global society get up to speed with it.

And this will take a long time - decades or centuries at least. Meanwhile it is inevitable that many people will begin to use the IAL in a more complex manner, informally, though upon the same fixed basis. They might do this by increasing the scope of the grammar and introducing transliterated words from outside of the minimum phonetic range - at the very least there is likely to be a feeling that the correct pronunciation of names should be reflected by the orthography.

There is no reason why these accretions should be discouraged. However, those who wish to be understood everywhere and to reach the widest possible audience, should limit themselves to the official

IAL. Additionally, there should be no grounds for any suspicion that the mother-tongues were being suppressed or extirpated. Finally, it will come to pass that all nations use the IAL with confidence, at which time the second phase should come into operation.

All the words and grammatical expressions validated and perfected by informal usage over a long period of time should then be incorporated. In practice this will mean the best features of the mother-tongues, which everyone will have already willingly abandoned, finding in the IAL a better means of communication. In effect the remaining mother-tongues will have died a natural death, though they continue to subsist in recorded form, and only one language will exist.

[2] 22/1/01 Ernobe

Gees! If those are the "general observations" I hate to think what the particularities will look like!

[3] 26/1/01 SleatorESM

That was a weird post. Just plain bizarre (not to mention wishful).

[4] 2/2/01 Alan Giles

We all have our own reasons for getting involved in language creation. For some it is the wish to see an international auxiliary language, for others, the simple satisfaction of creation and intellectual stimulation.

For those of us who have a particular interest in an IAL, it is necessary to lift our gaze from our navels sometimes and look around the world and also to look into the future. By thinking about the practical realities of the worldwide adoption of an IAL, Antony has drawn our attention to aspects of language development that we are going to have to take into account, whether we like it or not.

The basic theme of the IAL, starting as a second language and eventually becoming a first language, makes a lot of sense. Hence the importance of building in right from the start sufficient flexibility to absorb particular national language characteristics. As an example, Antony mentions the need for an ability in the orthography to include the correct pronunciation of names. This is an important point that we need to take into account right at the beginning if we hope that our particular IAL will be attractive to all foreign language speakers.

There is also no doubt that the matter will eventually become highly political, since national governments would need to agree what IAL would eventually be taught in their schools.

With regard to the role of an international committee, I see this as the only politically acceptable way that an IAL can be agreed. However I do not see such a committee playing a part in the initial development of the IAL itself. Committees study, modify, refine and finally agree, they do not create. There is a saying that a camel is just a horse designed by a committee!

There is still a role for the individual or small team of language inventors to create the IAL.

[5] 2/2/01 Antony Alexander

Thanks a lot, Alan. I think you're right that the coming international language congress or committee will have a mainly passive role. It's most unlikely that they will be called upon to create an entirely new language and script out of thin air; most probably they will ratify a previously agreed scheme, though with certain modifications, so as to assert their authority as a united body.

The EU currently spends over £2 billion (\$3 billion) p.a. on translation (often mistranslation); the UN and other international agencies even more. The EU consists of 15 members going on 27. For pressing social and economic reasons an IAL is going to be instituted in the not too distant future. Left to themselves, the politicians will choose the IAL promoted by the best-funded lobby group. This won't necessarily be the best choice.

A scientific approach is necessary. I hope LANG53 will be judged by that criterion and that at least some of it will pass muster.

Certainly not all of it: creating an IAL is far too big an enterprise for one person. Moreover, it's high time to face reality, so far as the IAL issue is concerned. Lest a version of Newspeak be foisted upon us we should be looking at existing IAL attempts with a view to synthesis. Why don't we start with Alan Giles' GILO at <http://www.gilo.org> - a very well laid out site and an exemplary grammar, don't we agree?

[6] 2/2/01 Ernobe

It may seem that creating an IAL is too big an enterprise for one person, but the only reason for this is that none of the existing languages have found it that easy to become accepted and actually learned for the sake of international cooperation and understanding. In fact, the whole concept of an IAL is so new to history that it is diametrically the opposite of what politicians would want to use it for (their own concerns). Concerning this I've said elsewhere:

Historically there has not been so far a widespread Christian government of the world, even though some may refer to the Catholic theocracy of earlier times as an example of it. The truth is that not ever within Islam, where it is known that major

aspects of public life like the judicial system and education are controlled by the religious authorities, has the true religious character of humanity received an adequate representation. Since the ineptitude of communication of peoples' true thoughts and intentions always favors those in power, and these have so far refused to really take religion seriously, therefore the long outdated and already useless concepts and irregularities of ancient languages are perpetuated, leaving most of us unable to improve our communication skills, which would increase our awareness of realities, and enable us to meditate profoundly on the significance of God's Word.

It is one of our misfortunes that language in general, and "modern" ones in particular, prove to be such a poor medium for the expression of human thought. For this reason, I've begun a project to spread a little known but highly effective IAL, Dutton Speedwords. Download a free glossary at <http://info.babylon.com/cgi-bin/temp.cgi?id=6679&layout=gloss.html>

[7] 6/2/01 Antony Alexander

Dutton Speedwords an IAL? I thought it was a shorthand system. Since I included a small part of Dutton's system in the Orthography section of LANG53 some months ago, shorthand text messaging on mobile phones seems to have become the latest thing. "WAN2TLK - ltle bk of txt msg" is a best-seller (in the UK, anyway). Could be that shorthand is here to stay. Comments, please, about my suggestion for combining a Dutton-type system with a consonantal script analogous to that in the Semitic languages (further details at <http://www.alexander.iofm.net>)

[8] 6/2/01 Ernobe

I'd like to comment on some of the sections of your website:

"The significant proportion of speakers who habitually employ a relatively extensive phonology and grammar will ultimately reject an IAL which lacks the potential capacity to incorporate the mother-tongues (LANGO Chapter Six)."

This would be true if everyone spoke each other's language and had some particular reason or need for favoring their own phonology and grammar. But since these don't even have any semantic value of themselves, the language that quite self-evidently has the simplest phonology and grammar will be the easiest for any person to incorporate, regardless of his own previous language.

"The need to reduce homography in its consonantal script is one reason why LANG53's vocabulary should be incorporated from the entire range of the world's languages. Even then, many potential consonant sequences would probably remain unused

- simply because they do not occur in the vocabulary of any existing language. Moreover, artificial neologisms containing unprecedented sequences might prove unpopular. A shorthand convention might circumvent this difficulty by employing "spare" consonant sequences. Shorthand systems using English letters are not unknown. For instance, PitmanScript has: "of ~ v, to ~ t, be ~ b, you ~ u, not ~ n, we ~ w, me ~ m, do ~ d"."

Again, if everybody spoke everybody else's language, the inclusion of the precise words of each language might be an issue that demands solution, but the truth is that even if this were the case, we would realize that each of the languages does not have some particular contribution to make to the IAL, but that each of them has their own way of saying the same things. A shorthand is useful not only for economy's sake, it allows a more precise systematic arrangement of the words (morphemes) for a more comprehensive understanding of the languages' expressive potential, which provides for a more intelligent and effective use of it. Such is the case with Dutton Speedwords. I have yet to read the section of your site on the grammar, but it may be useful to point out that Speedwords utilizes letters to signify semantic qualities of words that make up their definition, so that the grammar (the construction of the actual sentences) will be determined by self-evident considerations which follow from the meaning of the words. Rather than having grammatical features as an aid to understanding, Speedwords relies on the effectiveness of its word formation, that guarantees a one meaning per word system which covers all words without any synonyms and even provides words to substitute a word whose meaning is ambiguous. The grammar is thus the simplest that can be imagined, even simpler than English.

[9] 11/2/01 Antony Alexander

>I'd

like to comment on some of the sections of your website:

>"The significant proportion of speakers who habitually employ a relatively extensive phonology and >grammar will ultimately reject an IAL which lacks the potential capacity to incorporate the mother->tongues (LANGO Chapter Six)."

Unless a hacker has got to the online edition you are looking at, you won't find this sentence in LANGO Chapter Six. However it does look familiar, as though I did actually write it, so I'll assume you found it elsewhere in my site.

In that case, the context from which you excised it would have emphasised that by "ultimately" I meant a time in the distant future - as in the following passage at the end of the "Minimal Grammar" section of "LANG53 Grammar":

"....LANG53 will be an auxiliary language for a very long time, i.e. generations or centuries. There will be no need, in the foreseeable future, for it to combine with the advanced grammar of certain mother-tongues. Analytic grammar will be quite sufficient."

>This would be true if everybody spoke each others language

Whether through my fault or not, you don't seem to have fully understood the fundamental thesis of LANGO and LANG53.

For argument's sake, let's divide all IALers into two camps. On the one hand, those who believe that, after the IAL is officially instituted, everyone will always and for all time speak at least two languages - the various mother-tongues for domestic consumption and the IAL for international communication. On the other hand, there are those who agree with the underlying theme of LANGO and LANG53: that all languages will eventually merge into a single language, by way of an official IAL, and that this process is merely a conscious continuation of what is already occurring.

It seems to me that the first of these two groups believes neither in the feasibility of a single universal language and associated voluntary global culture of free peoples, nor in the other extreme, where culture is exclusively defined as national or ethnic. In this latter restricted sense, each culture is perceived as a unique combination of historical, national, racial, political and religious elements, to which only one particular language can do justice. Supporters of this position don't like the concept of an official IAL, and some would go further by denouncing internationalism itself for mixing together what should be kept separate, and for introducing national and racial conflict into the world.

Hence the "two languages forever" brigade disbelieve in the possibility of a single universal language and culture (of free peoples), and yet endorse the idea of an IAL. They hold that the primary focus of culture is national or ethnic, but that international agencies are necessary in order to support the requisite level of material civilisation, through trade, tourism, transport, communications, science, peace-keeping and the like.

Thus the international agencies deal in mundanities, whereas the more spiritual side of life - found through historic denominations, modern sects and media, secular philosophies, national treasuries of literature, and all the arts to which language is peripheral rather than central - is not "global" or "international" in any real sense, since it is always linked to a particular culture or tradition.

The fact that international agencies restrict their sphere of

operation to material necessities allows for a rudimentary IAL employed solely as an auxiliary or second language. The use of a pidgin between trading nations is a microcosmic analogy. A true (uncreolised) pidgin does not develop its own internal structure, and cannot survive independently, precisely because nobody is using it as a primary language or mother-tongue.

I think Glosa is one of the best IALs of this type. It has no inflections and only four tenses (in fact three would be enough, as the original author pointed out). Words can be used interchangeably as noun, adjective and verb, and twenty auxiliaries constitute the grammar around the SVO syntax (incl. SVO subordinate clauses).

Notice, however, that the fewness of moods and tenses limits Glosa's ability to discuss moral questions and report events from different perspectives, that the inability to distinguish parts of speech except in context invites confusion at second-hand, that the paucity of phonemes restricts vocal expression, that the Greek / Latin basis of the vocabulary hardly favours international acceptability, and so on.

>and had some particular reason or need for favoring their own phonology and grammar. But since >these don't even have any semantic value of themselves,

Everyone has "some particular reason or need for favoring their own phonology and grammar", which is that they see it as superior to others. It might have no semantic value internationally, in some cases, but it certainly does for that people. Wouldn't you value English if the New World Order suddenly announced that all languages were henceforth forbidden except for "Newspeak"?

>the language that quite self-evidently has the simplest phonology and grammar will be the easiest >for any person to incorporate, regardless of his own previous language.

Essentially, I believe that "unofficial creolisation" will take place whilst "the official IAL", whether it is called LANG53 or anything else, remains at a very simple and basic level until all the people of the world (some of whom have an even simpler and more basic language) have caught up with it. Later on - in the distant future - the "unofficial IAL" will become the de facto language of the world, since the best qualities of all languages will be expressed within it.

I don't personally believe that an official IAL could long survive without this process happening. Everywhere two languages are constantly and habitually used there is transfer of vocabulary and import of grammatical structure: vide "Spanglish" in the USA and "mix" in Singapore. An official IAL artificially constrained from all fundamental development would

simply be rejected after a while. Look what's happening to Esperanto.

The secret of success, so I believe, is to incorporate scope for expandability and expansibility into the orthography and grammar of the very basic "official IAL". For instance, the alphabet might have the capacity to represent 53 phonemes without the use of digraphs, even though the initial core vocabulary would employ no more than about 30 phonemes. The essential point is that the "official" and "advanced unofficial" versions of the IAL, and all stages in between, should always be exactly the same language: thus the "official" IAL should result from an "advanced unofficial" version of the IAL being used in a simple way.

What you write about Dutton Speedwords seems valid enough. I can only repeat that the best parts of all languages, "national" or "constructed" (the difference is only one of degree), will eventually be found in the single global tongue.

(From 12/2/01 Deja.com Newsgroups were operated by Google.com, under a different format.)

[10] 15/2/01 Ernobe

You seem to believe that the formation of the IAL will come about as the beginnings of language itself in human evolution. In other words, everybody is just learning language skills and prone to form creolizations, or mixes of idioms, as if we were still in the age in which, thru lack of contact between peoples, they were still forming their languages as significant aspects of their cultural identity. But even though recent examples of creolization exist, these are evidently dying out, or at best examples of where the civilising process that distinguishes our age has gone amuck. They occur in those areas where we are learning how not to civilize peoples.

On the other hand, you would not be involved in the IAL movement if you hadn't realized the drawbacks of language as we now use it to further human progress. These are subtle drawbacks, because with the spread of science and education, the immense separation that keeps peoples apart from the simple fact of not understanding each others speech is hidden by the no less dramatic changes that everyone has experienced because of the advances of science. Everybody seems too busy to simply look over their shoulder, so to say, and behold the vast vistas that could unfold for their future progress if only they could reach out to their fellows, who are day to day coming ever closer to them by means of the marvellous advances in communication and scientific and cultural exchanges.

Besides these observations, your logic is flawed in that if the international agencies are and will continue to

affect mainly our material development, as opposed to the spiritual side, an official IAL would by that token alone be impeded from realizing the internal developments you foresee. Whenever an official IAL has been linked with "official government business" that pretty much spelled its doom as far as any development is concerned (Latin). If, as you say creolizations naturally devolve into unified languages, why are there dead languages? Under these circumstances, can anyone claim to have the proper standard for creating the IAL? Since international endeavours are still in their infancy, what can be said that defines international acceptability? I think that the misunderstandings of the moral significance of language and communication has taught us the hard way, by trial and error, that an effort is required this time to get our moral priorities in order and invest the time and effort necessary to learn the language that can demonstrate that it has been specifically designed for this purpose. The present and future errors in the political arena will make people fed up with the vagaries of rhetoric, and unwilling to accept anything but that which will most effeciently communicate their hopes and aspirations.

L A N G O

"Language Organisation"

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A FULLY DEMOCRATIC APPROACH TOWARDS

AN INTERNATIONAL AUXILIARY LANGUAGE

INITIALLY BASED ON REFORMED ENGLISH

by

Robert Craig & Antony Alexander

" E P L U
R I B U S U N
U M "

**

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Revised 1998

For this 1998 Internet edition we have taken the opportunity to correct a handful of factual and typographical errors and to remedy a few infelicities of style and/or punctuation. Apart from these minor changes, and rewrites at the end of Chapter 8 and in the middle of Chapter 20, the text and layout are as in the first edition.

ADDITIONAL NOTE, 2001

In the process of posting LANGO on to this new site an opportunity was taken to bring the text up to date and effect a few other minor changes. There are no plans for a second edition of LANGO.

LANG53

(ninth edition, Feb. 2001)

is a continuation of LANGO in a less-anglicised form.

Key

This publication is principally aimed at the general reader who may be unacquainted with basic linguistic terminology and symbols. For this reason, references, footnotes and the International Phonetic Alphabet are omitted and a glossary is

included at the back.

[]

identifies letters on the page

// indicates their pronunciation.

For example, [sc] = /sh/ (4th para. of Chapter 1) means that the digraph "sc" (in Old English) is pronounced "sh" as in "she"; likewise /dh/ and /th/ (6th para. of Chapter 2) represent sounds - the initial consonant phonemes in "that" and "thin".

Preface

The Biblical story of the Tower of Babel reminds us that the notion of a universal language has existed for a very long time. There have been numerous candidates including Sumerian, Akkadian, Hittite, Babylonian, Persian, Aramaic, Greek and Latin in the West; and Sanskrit, Pali and Chinese in the East.

The motto of the U.S.A. is reproduced above to signify the goal of global language unification - which no doubt will be ultimately realised through an international auxiliary language. The authors of the Constitution of the United States would have been mindful of Latin as the most successful universal language when they chose this aphorism - linking what would become the foremost English-speaking country with the Roman civilisation of antiquity.

For almost two thousand years Latin had played the role of common language to the known world, but the founders of the American Republic would have known it as a long-unchanged predominately written language used by scholars. At that time, French was still the accepted universal language of culture and diplomacy, but subsequent events, influenced by the failure of the 1745 Jacobite rebellion in Scotland, conspired to pass the mantle of the international auxiliary language on to English - which still retains it, though with less than wholehearted support from other language groups.

Indeed, the unwillingness of the great powers to agree upon one of their own languages for use as a common tongue led to the concept of a politically neutral and orthographically consistent artificial language. The past 150 years have seen numerous attempts to construct such a language from familiar elements like common word-roots. Esperanto has remained pre-eminent among these constructed languages but has failed to correct serious defects of grammar and vocabulary.

As we have seen in Northern Ireland and former Yugoslavia, a shared language is no guarantor of peace; but it does allow a wider understanding of the issues, so that the cause of problems may be identified and rooted out. With the world facing an unprecedented

range of potential disasters, from terrorism to ecological breakdown, the need for a universal language to facilitate co-operation has never been greater.

Moreover, unmistakable signs of progress towards a lasting peace and harmonious civilisation are evident throughout the world, inseparable from the remarkable 20th Century advances in standardisation, in all branches of arts and sciences, in religious understanding, and in education. This outpouring of knowledge, though pictured by a global media, can really only be shared through the use of language. A common tongue may not be the whole answer, but is certainly part of it.

Introduction

The present account attempts to promote our belief that a reformed version of the English language, prepared according to democratic procedures, would now be the best starting-point for a planned international auxiliary language.

In theory there are two strands of thought here: the concept of an international auxiliary language, and the idea of English spelling reform. Hitherto, these causes have usually been treated separately - an artificial auxiliary language on one hand, and proposals to improve English for use within the English-speaking world on the other - but in practice they are already inseparably combined in the form of the pre-eminent multinational status of the English language.

The following 21 chapters build upon this realisation by advocating the orthographic reform of an offspring of English to an international standard, the substitution of words from other languages, and the possible incorporation of certain rationalised grammatical forms pioneered by the creoles. The intention is to initiate an empirical process of reform towards a revised version of English, not only for everyday usage, but also for the attention of the globally representative committee of linguists that will eventually be appointed to choose the international auxiliary language.

The cost of translation between increasingly interdependent language groups might well force the convention of this body of experts sooner rather than later. Currently it would have to choose between a traditional, organic, "natural" language such as English, Spanish, Russian, Arabic or Farsi, and one of the rationalised but limited constructed languages such as Esperanto or Glosa. We are offering proposals towards a third alternative which would incorporate and harmonise the essential qualities of both national and artificial tongues.

The suggestions in Chapter 19 are offered as concrete examples in the hope of stimulating discussion. The result of such schemes would be perfectly comprehensible to English speakers, at least for a

considerable period of time, though the spelling would be different from the start. Moreover, a language so revised would always be an auxiliary - at least in name - so traditional varieties of English could remain in their present roles as long as demand for them continued.

It is all very well to set out the linguistic requirements of a world language, and project a path from an existing tongue towards it, but the exercise is merely academic unless various cultural phenomena expressed through language are taken into consideration. One of these is the now well-established democratic point of view which would challenge the primacy, though not at all the validity, of "autocratic" and "objective scientific" approaches to language reform.

single page

chapter 1

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