Temporality in spoken Esperanto

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Abstract. In this article, we present some of the results of an empirical study of temporality in Esperanto spoken by informants of three mother tongues: French, Italian and Russian. By comparing the production of the subjects, this article treats transfer in Esperanto at the conceptual level, not through the forms produced, but rather by considering the preference of the speaker for such and such form used to express a given function. When reading Zamenhof's writings, we can notice that there is an underlying attribution of aspectual values to participles. Many examples of oral production confirm the evolutionary character of the temporal system of Esperanto.

Resumo. *Uzado de verbaj formoj en parolata esperanto.*
La artikolo analizas la uzadon de verbaj formoj en Esperanto parolata de personoj havantaj la francan, la italan aŭ la rusan kiel denaskan lingvon kaj montras kiel ĝi influas la elekton de ekzistantaj verbaj formoj kaj la aldonon de tempaj kaj aspektaj valoroj. Komparo farita kun la uzado de verbaj formoj en la originala verkaro de L. Zamenhof permesas kompreni lian logikon. Tiu-ĉi studo klarigas nuntempan uzadon de Esperanto kaj ĝian evoluon.

Résumé. *Temporalité en l'espéranto parlé.*
L'article analyse l'utilisation des formes verbales en espéranto parlé par des sujets de trois langues maternelles différentes (français, italien, russe) afin de démontrer comment la langue première intervient dans la sélection des formes verbales existantes et dans l'attribution des valeurs temporo-aspectuelles. Une comparaison est faite avec l'utilisation de la morphologie verbale par L. Zamenhof lui-même pour comprendre sa logique. L'étude contribue à une meilleure compréhension du fonctionnement de l'espéranto parlé actuellement et de son évolution.

Numerous works have been published about Esperanto, proclaiming both its merits as an international language and the benefits of the very existence of such a language. While the mechanics of Esperanto on a theoretical level have been documented, its oral use remains a mystery of sorts. Few linguists devote themselves to the study of Esperanto. Even today, the word *Esperanto* provokes emotional reactions that can go as far as

"Esperanto? Come on now, it doesn't exist anymore!" This was the reaction of certain linguists I invited to my doctoral thesis defence in 1997, which dealt with spoken Esperanto (Dankova 1997b). Esperanto instills mistrust in linguists who do not believe in its existence or who refuse to take any interest in it from a scientific perspective. On the other hand, the enthusiasm of certain defenders of Esperanto, non-linguists, often hits a wall, since the arguments advanced in support of the language and its advantages often betray a lack of linguistic knowledge. Heated discourse about Esperanto in no way contributes to advancing the understanding of the way Esperanto works as a language, nor to the establishment of a dialogue between linguists and Esperantists. Humphrey Tonkin and Mark Fettes summarize the situation well:

> ... know Esperanto is to be regarded as an enthusiast, and hence biased; not to know it obviously disqualifies the researcher from writing about it (or ought to: there are some notorious exceptions). Hence the opportunities for outsiders to get to know the language and its community well are severely restricted. Such ignorance in turn weakens the claims of Esperanto speakers, for example about the extent of the Esperanto movement, the efficacy of the language, or its role in international life, because they cannot be verified through the testimony of reliably objective scholars. (Tonkin & Fettes 1996)

Marc van Oostendorp (1999:52) also evokes that "the lack of interest displayed by esperantologists for phonology is as unjustified as the disdain for Esperanto displayed by phonologists." Spoken Esperanto has rarely been the focus of psycholinguistic study based on authentic corpora. As such, many aspects of the language have been abandoned by researchers.

Linguistic standards in Esperanto, an emotionally charged subject, were the focus of a study undertaken by Marie-Thérèse Lloancy (1995). She notices a prescriptive tendency in the people who participated in the study, as well as the fact that native speakers of Esperanto are not considered to speak a superior version of the language than those who speak Esperanto as a second language. Hiroshi Nagata and Renato Corsetti (2005) examine the judgement of grammatical acceptability of different types of phrases by adopting the methodology of error analysis. They also examine the differences in the judgements and in the productions in Esperanto of speakers whose mother tongues are typologically distant. The authors themselves recognize the limits of error analysis that they use in the interpretation of the results of their study:

> El la metoda vidpunkto ĉi tiu analizo povas esti kritikata, car ĝi sekvas la tradician analizon de la eraroj ... [Translation: From the perspective of methodology, this analysis can be criticised, since it follows traditional error analysis ...] (Nagata & Corsetti 2005:22)

Error analysis has been widely criticised, to the point that it has sparked more elaborate approaches that consider the influence of the first language (L1) and the transfer into the second language (L2) in all their complexities, taking into consideration the communicative strategies of learners of L2. The issue of the influence of the mother tongue on L2 production remains particularly interesting in the case of Esperanto, given the context in which Esperanto is used and the grammar as it has been presented by the founder of the language. Esperanto spoken in a multilingual setting is influenced by the mother tongue of the speaker, but also by the multiple ways in which it is used by speakers of other L1 to whom each speaker of Esperanto is exposed when communicating.

Zamenhof founded his language on a morphological basis, that is, starting with a common inventory (radicals, affixes, articles, etc.) that may be manipulated, on an individual basis, according to the logic of the speaker's first language. In addition to expressing what is required by the language (for instance, subject, pronoun, verb tense and accusative), the speaker can also use other means to express that which may be optional, such as the feminine when speaking of animals (*katino* 'female cat'), the prefix marking the collective which includes the masculine and the feminine (*gekatoj* 'cats, male and female'), and complex verbal forms, which will be analyzed later in this article. Let us consider a simple example: definite/indefinite opposition. While this notion is universal, it is not grammaticalized in some languages. Furthermore, when it is grammaticalized, the way in which it is expressed varies from one language to another. How does Esperanto function in this situation? The grammar states that the definite article is *la*, regardless of gender and number. The omission of *la* corresponds to an indefinite article. Zamenhof specifies that the article may be omitted, first of all if its use is problematic for speakers whose L1 does not include articles. Surprisingly, he also states that articles in Esperanto are used in the same way as those in the speaker's L1. Standing before a locked door, a French person could say:

(1a) *J'ai oublié ma clé.*
        I forgot my key.

where the use of the possessive determiner excludes that of the article.

An Italian would say:

(1b) *Ho dimenticato la chiave.*
        I forgot the key.

while a Russian would say:

(1c) Я забыл ключ. *Ya zabyl klyuč.*
        ⟨I forgot key.⟩

Both Romance languages—French and Italian—are typologically very close and still proceed differently when it comes to the use of articles. Italian permits the use of both the possessive determiner and the article (*la mia chiave*), while French does not. As for the Russian example, the noun *klyuč* 'key', has no determiner at all. In Esperanto, according to the grammar, one should say:

(1d)   *Mi forgesis la ŝlosilon.*
        I forgot the key.

while those who are "exempt" from using articles would say:

(1e)   *Mi forgesis ŝlosilon.*
        ⟨I forgot key.⟩

The way in which any concept or event is expressed depends not only on the means available in a language, but also on the rhetorical style inherent to this language, an element that Dan I. Slobin refers to as *thinking for speaking*. Rhetorical style explains why certain languages, despite having identical or similar means of expression, demonstrate notable differences in the formulation of a message, or in its general discursive organization. Slobin (1996) states:

> In my own formulation: the expression of experience in linguistic terms consti-
> tutes **thinking for speaking** – a special form of thought that is mobilized for
> communication. Whatever effects grammar may or may not have outside of
> the act of speaking, the sort of mental activity that goes on while formulating
> utterances is not trivial or obvious, and deserves our attention. We encounter
> the contents of the mind in a special way when they are being accessed for
> use. That is, the activity of thinking takes on a particular quality when it is
> employed in the activity of speaking. In the evanescent time frame of con-
> sulting utterances in discourse one fits one's thoughts into available linguistic
> frames. "Thinking for speaking" involves picking those characteristics of ob-
> jects and events that (a) fit some conceptualization of the event, and (b) are
> readily encodable in the language. **I propose that, in acquiring a native
> language, the child learns particular ways of thinking for speaking.**
> (Slobin 1996:76)

Each language possesses its own set of grammatical categories and rules of usage. When learning a second language, a speaker is faced with two language systems that are more or less different from one another and that must be put into a relationship. The first language serves as a point of reference in the process of acquiring a second language and influences the production in L2. As a second language, Esperanto has a rare peculiarity in that there are few native speakers that can serve as a reference by providing a standard of usage. There are no territories or stable linguistic communities associated with the language. Unlike other languages, Esperanto follows the standard founded

on grammatical acceptability: any grammatically constructed statement is acceptable. The following French example illustrates this principle: When greeting someone, one may say *bonjour* 'good day', *bonsoir* 'good evening' or *bonne nuit* 'good night'. Logically, one should also be able to say **bon matin* 'good morning', as is done in English, German and Russian, but French usage does not permit it.

On the subject of native speakers of Esperanto, a comment must be made. While there are, in fact, people who learn Esperanto as a first language, their use of the language reflects that of their parents, who are frequently of different nationalities and speak Esperanto in conditions of linguistic isolation. In these cases, Esperanto is often the only common language between the parents at the beginning of their relationship. Native speakers are never unilingual. Bilingualism, if it is not instilled right from the start, is developed when the child begins school, at which time the use of Esperanto is reduced considerably. Native speakers are but a small minority in the Esperantophone community. In the author's opinion, no speaker may rightly claim to speak a standard form of Esperanto.

In this article, we will present some of the results of an empirical study of Esperanto spoken by informants of three different mother tongues: French, Italian and Russian. The informants were recorded during semi-guided interviews that unfolded according to a strict protocol. The corpus is composed of two types of narrative texts: stories produced on the basis of a series of images *Cat Story* (see page 51; cf. Maya Hickmann 1982) and stories relating a personal experience from the past. The informants speak Esperanto at a very advanced level and use the language in their daily lives.

Methods and data

The domain of temporality, with its conceptual complexities and various means of expression, offers a choice vantage point from which to study the influence of the L1. In all languages, a specific set of means allows the expression of temporality. The relationships between time and tense are not symmetrical. Narrative discourse, the focus of this study, reports events by situating them in time. When telling a story, the narrator organizes information by combining various means of expressing temporality with discursive strategies. The terms *tense, aspect, Aktionsart,* and *adverbial expressions of time*, as they are used here, are defined by Wolfgang Klein (1994):

> Tenses and aspects, as defined here, are abstract temporal relations. Languages encode them in various ways. It may be a language collapses all tenses distinguished here in one morphological form, hence has no overt (morphological) tense marking; similarly for aspect. (Klein 1994:24)

For a definition of temporality and its various means of expressions, see also Dietrich et al. (1995).

The adopted theoretical framework, which distinguishes between a concept and its expression and between a form and its function, makes it possible to compare productions in four languages that have different ways of expressing temporality.

The informants, whose productions are at the basis of our study, were selected based on linguistic, social and psychological criteria. At the time of the interviews, the informants were 23 to 40 years of age. Regional differences that exist in spoken French and Italian were taken into consideration: Francophone informants come from Île-de-France and Italophone informants come from northern Italy. All informants have a similar socio-economic profile. They speak Esperanto on a regular basis, actively participate in meetings of Esperantists, and can be considered bilingual in terms of the definition by Georges Lüdi and Bernard Py (1986), that is, they use both languages in their everyday life. Most informants speak other second languages. Some live with a spouse of a different nationality and speak Esperanto within their family. The interviewer and author of this article knows the informants personally, which allowed the interviews to take place in an informal atmosphere, giving way to spontaneity and a certain level of familiarity. The goal of the study was not revealed to the informants.

Three groups of informants, made up of men and women, produced stories in Esperanto: ten Francophones from France, ten Italophones and ten Russophones. The same number of people made up test groups and produced stories respectively in French, Italian and Russian. The interviews took place following the same protocol. The informants produced several types of stories (stories based on images and stories based on personal experiences). Given the very strict selection criteria, the informants are considered to be representative and the number of informants used corresponds to the number of people usually used in this type of study.

Informants were selected based on a deliberate choice of L1. French and Italian have very similar verbal systems; however, in oral discourse, the use of available verbal forms occurs differently. Both Romance languages have simple and compound tenses made up of the auxiliary verbs *to be* and *to have* followed by a past participle. Italian is marked by great regional variations. It should be noted that when speaking of this language here, we refer to the standardized Italian spoken in northern Italy.

Unlike in the cases of French and Italian, the use of verbal forms in Russian is determined by both aspect and tense. Each verbal form (including infinitives, participles and gerunds) is marked by aspect, to which the expression of time is subordinate. In Russian, the passive form is rare and not

all active forms have a corresponding passive form. Russian presents a peculiarity that consists in the expression of the verbal aspect and *Aktionsart*, for example:

Verb	*pisat′*	**na**pisat′	**do**pisat′
Notion	⟨to write⟩	⟨to write⟩	⟨to write⟩
Aspect	imperfective	perfective	perfective
Aktionsart	durative	resultative	terminative
Meaning	'to write'	'to have written'	'to finish writing'

Limited space prevents a detailed presentation of the specificities of the verbal systems of the three languages. For more information on this matter, the reader may wish to consult the grammars mentioned in the reference section (Grevisse, Sensini and Wade) or Dankova (1997b).

Discussion and results

In the domain of temporality, this diversity is combined with a multitude of choices offered by Zamenhof's official grammar, *Fundamento de Esperanto*. Esperanto has numerous verbal forms, the use and agreement of which are not defined by the founder of the language. Verbs may take on a simple or compound form.

The *Fundamento* refers to tense rather than aspect. This does not mean that Esperanto does not allow for the marking of aspect. Aspect marking does not occur in simple verbal tenses. Thus, the phrase *Mi skribis leteron* may be interpreted as 'I wrote a letter' or 'I was writing a letter', depending on the context. Zamenhof, a Russian Jew who was living in Bielostok, Grodno Governorate, Russia,[1] as a child and in Warsaw when he published his first book as a young man, considered Russian to be his first language. It is highly probable that Russian and Polish would have influenced the temporal system of Esperanto more than any of the other languages he knew. According to Russian and Polish models, it is possible (though not mandatory) to add a prefix in order to specify verbal aspect. Thus, in practice, *Li lernis la italan* 'He was learning Italian' may be opposed, in terms of aspect, to *Li ellernis la italan* 'He learned Italian (and he speaks it)'. *Lernis* and *ellernis* may be interpreted as imperfective and perfective, respectively. This possibility of distinguishing between aspects is not mentioned in the grammar of the founder of Esperanto, though it is present in productions (cf. also Michel Duc Goninaz 1974), as well as in Zamenhof's writings in Esperanto. It should be noted that the *Fundamento*

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[1] In Russian Бѣлостокъ; now Białystok, Poland.

| Verbal form	Conjugated verb	Active participle	Passive participle
infinitive	*parol**i*** 'to speak'		
present	*li parol**as*** 'he speaks'	*parol**anta**** 'speaking'	*parol**at**a* '[is] spoken'
past	*li parol**is*** 'he spoke'	*parol**int**a** 'having spoken'	*parol**it**a* '[was] spoken'
future	*li parol**os*** 'he will speak'	*parol**ont**a** 'having to speak'	*parol**ot**a* '[to be] spoken'
conditional	*li parol**us*** 'he would speak'		
subjunctive	*(ke) li parol**u*** '(I want him) to speak'		
imperative	*parol**u**!* 'speak!'		

Table 1. *Verbal forms in Esperanto*
* Gerunds are built on participles by changing the desinence from *-a* to *-e* and may, like participles, take on three forms: *parolante* 'speaking', *parolinte* 'having spoken', *parolonte* 'having to speak'.

does not give any instructions with regard to certain notions such as verbal prefixation, the order of words, etc. Therefore, even though they are not outlined in the grammar, implicit rules exist and are respected by the founder himself.

Compound tenses are formed through the combination of the verb *esti* 'to be' with a passive or active participle. Each participle (passive or active) may take on three forms that are called, in Zamenhof's grammar, present, past or future participles. Any combination of the verb *esti* 'to be' with one of the participles is possible. Participial markers may be infixed in verbs such as, for example, *Se mi pov**int**us, mi venus* 'If I could have come, I would have come', although the *Fundamento* does not recommend this usage. Zamenhof was aware that the grammar of Esperanto presented in the *Fundamento* was not sufficiently explicit.[2] However, the lack of clearly formulated rules leaves room for subjective interpretations by learners and speakers of Esperanto.

As with a set of Lego blocks, each speaker may build a personalized Esperanto with the numerous means offered by the language. The speaker's mother

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[2]On this subject, see G. Mattos (1999), who focuses on a number of grey areas in the *Fundamento*, notably temporal vs. aspectual values in the verbal forms of Esperanto.
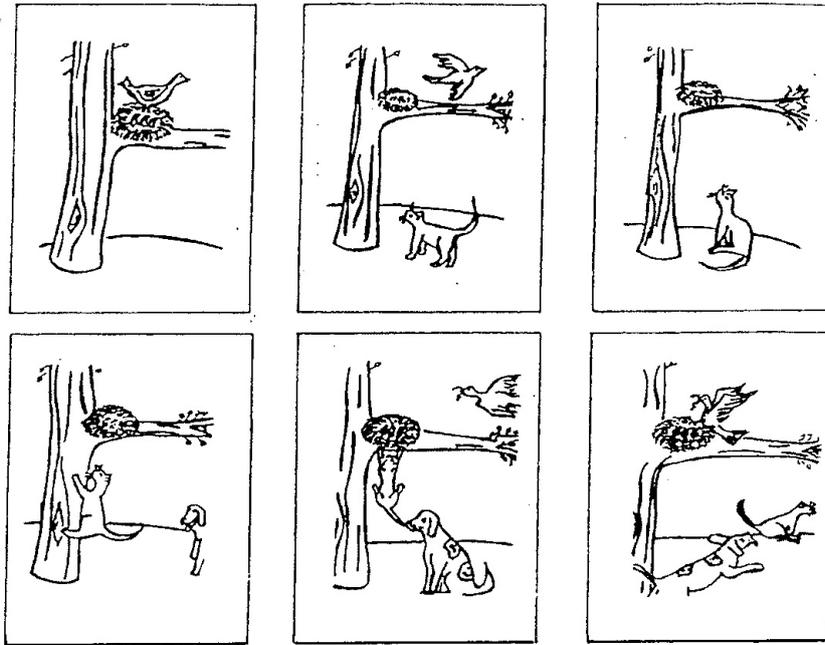
Cat Story

tongue manifests itself in the means selected. Thus, in Esperanto, we could speak of transfer based not on produced forms, but rather on the orientation toward one form with a given function or another, as any morphologically correct form is acceptable. The transfer is treated from a conceptual point of view. It is therefore a functional transfer rather than a lexical transfer, although the two are often connected.

When asked to produce a text by recounting something that has happened—describing a person, speaking of plans, etc.—each speaker executes a series of operations, both psycholinguistic (the act of recalling, the selection of information) and linguistic (the choice of lexical means, verbalization) (cf. Levelt 1989, Slobin 1991, 2003). The L1 is involved in the conceptualization of the verbal task, which is different for speakers of different mother tongues. Esperanto allows for a choice, among the means offered, of those that correspond to the linguistic needs of speakers of a given mother tongue.

The last part of three stories of which the support, a series of images entitled *Cat Story* (Hickmann 1982) often used by researchers working in the field of second language acquisition, allow for an illustration of the use of the means of expression of temporality of three informants of different mother tongues. These stories were judged representative of those collected for the corpus.

Story 1 (Informant: JEN, L1: Russian)

1. *kaj jen **venis** la kato al la nesto*
   and then came the cat to the nest
2. *kaj jam preskaŭ **kaptis** la birdojn*
   and already almost caught the birds
3. *sed nia hundo **tiris** la katon per la vosto*
   but our dog pulled the cat by the tail
4. *kaj ĵus en la momento kiam la patrino-birdo **revenis***
   and just at the moment when the mother bird returned
5. *la hundo **forpelis** la katon "For!"*
   the dog chased the cat "Away!"
6. *kaj jen la ĉarmaj birdetoj **ricevas** la insektojn de la patrino-birdo*
   and there the charming baby birds receive the insects from the mother bird
7. *kaj **hontigita** kato **forfuĝas***
   and ashamed cat runs away

In this first story, told by a Russian speaker, there is little variation in the verbal morphology: we find five simple forms of the past in *-is*, two simple forms of the present in *-as* and one form of the passive participle (called past) in *-ita*. The temporal relationships between events are marked in part by adverbial expressions of time (*jam* 'already', *preskaŭ* 'almost', *ĵus en la momento* 'just at the moment'). Two verbs, *forpeli* 'to chase away, to expel' and *forfuĝi* 'to run away', are used here with the prefix *for-*. In Russian, the mother tongue of the informant, prefixation serves to shape both the perfective aspect and the *Aktionsarten*, and the same plurifunctionality exists in productions in Esperanto by Russians. Thus, in line 5, the perfective aspect is expressed through the use of the marking of the past *-is* and the prefix *for-*. In line 7, the same prefix *for-* marks the direction 'away' (*Aktionsart*) of the verb *forfuĝi* 'to run away', used in the present form. In the narration, the opposition of the past in *-is* and the present in *-as* is often used as a perfective-imperfective type of opposition. This phenomenon is also observed in people learning different second languages.

The use of verbal prefixation occurs under the influence of a particular language: in Esperanto, Russian speakers use certain verbal prefixes, as per the Russian model, as a complementary means of marking the perfective aspect. Insofar as all the stories of the Russian speakers recorded are recounted in the past, prefixation concerns, first and foremost, verbs in the past tense in *-is*, and represents an additional way of distinguishing the perfective from the imperfective, a fundamental distinction in Russian of great conceptual importance for Russian speakers. Prefixation as a means of marking aspect is not present in the official grammar of Esperanto. Its use is testament not only to the influence of a particular language, but also to the creative activity of speakers.

Story 2 (Informant: FRA, L1: Italian)

1. *bonŝance tie proksime **estis** bona hundo*
   happily there not far was a good dog
2. *kiu **malpermesis** tion*
   who forbade it
3. ***prenante** la katon per la vosto*
   by taking the cat by the tail
4. *kiam la patrino-birdo **revenis** kun mangaĵo por siaj birdetoj*
   when the mother bird returned with food for her baby birds
5. *la kato **estis forfuĝinta postsekvata** de la hundo*
   the cat had run away chased by the dog

Story 2 was produced by an Italian speaker. Here, next to simple forms such as *estis* 'was', *malpermesis* 'forbade', and *revenis* 'returned', we find a gerund in the present *prenante* 'while taking', a complex compound form of the verb *esti* 'to be' used in the past tense, and two participles. The participle *forfuĝinta* 'had run away' contains a suffix *-int-* and finds itself in a relationship of anteriority with the event described in the temporal subordinate, as well as with the perfective value. The suffix *-at-* in the participle *postsekvata* 'chased', of imperfective value, serves to express its simultaneous occurrence with the event of the subordinate. Thus, *Kiam la patrino-birdo revenis kun mangaĵo por siaj birdetoj, la kato estis forfuĝinta postsekvata de la hundo* is interpreted as 'When the mother bird returned, the cat had run away and (was) chased by the dog'.

In order to ensure regularity, the founder of the language introduced a correspondence between conjugated verbs and participles. According to Zamenhof, the present (as it is called in his terminology) would always be marked by the vowel *-a-* in the morphemes of tense of verbal forms, for example: *li parolas* 'he speaks', *parolanta* 'speaking', *parolata* 'spoken'. The same

would follow for the past, marked by the vowel *-i-*, and the future, marked by *-o-*. In absolute terms, this remains valid for the simple forms that express tense and dissipate the differences in aspect.

With regard to participles, this correspondence is illusory. In the analyzed corpus, the active and passive participles ending respectively with *-inta* and *-ita* have a perfective value, while the participles ending in *-anta* and *-ata* are imperfective. The last example shows this clearly: *la kato estis forfuĝinta postsekvata* 'the cat had run away and (was) chased'. This raises a question: what is the value of active participles in *-onta* and passive participles in *-ota*, which Zamenhof calls future participles, that do not have a correspondence in the languages of our informants? In the corpus, the participle in *-onta* only appears once with the value of the prospective in the past: *La kato estis preskaŭ atingonta la neston* 'the cat was almost at the point of reaching the nest'. There is no passive future participle.

The Italian speakers use almost all existing verbal forms in Esperanto, while the Russian speakers and the French speakers use a more limited number of forms. Nevertheless, as a whole, simple forms (*-i, -is, -as*) constitute between 87 % and 95 % (depending on the group) of the total of all verbal forms used. Compound forms are generally used in cases where the contrast in aspect is necessary: to describe simultaneous actions, Italian speakers depend on verbal morphology, while Russian speakers turn to verbal prefixation and lexical means.

The third excerpt comes from a story produced by a French speaker. This informant used minimal means to reach the goal. The only form in *-is*, in *kiu alvenis* 'that had arrived', combines the expression of the past, and therefore of tense, with the perfective aspect and describes an event accomplished in the past. The adverb *finfine* 'at last' specifies the position of one event in relation to others. For French speakers, the use of the present as a narrative tense is very common both in Esperanto and in French.

Story 3 (Informant: PAT, L1: French)

1. *do **estas** tiu bredhundo*
   so is (it's) this shepherd dog[3]
2. *kiu **alvenis***
   that had arrived
3. *kaj **mordas** ĝian voston*
   and bites his tail

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[3]The word *bredhundo* does not mean 'a sheep dog, a shepherd dog' in Esperanto. During the conversation in French PAT used the word *berger* 'shepherd (dog)' in order to refer to the dog of *Cat Story*. Our translation is based on this interpretation of *bredhundo* from the context.

4. *kaj **forkuras** ĝin finfine*
   and (makes) him flee at last
5. *do kaj **revenas** la birdino*
   so and returns the (female) bird
6. *kaj tute trankvile donas mangaĵon al infanoj*
   and very gently gives food to children

Although the role of temporal adverbials is not discussed here (cf. Dankova 1997a, 2002), the analyses were made while taking into consideration the interaction between verbal morphology and the different types of temporal adverbials in Esperanto and in the L1. The choice of adverbial means in Esperanto is influenced both by the L1 and by the framework of verbal morphology in Esperanto.

The differences in the verbal morphology of speakers of different mother tongues lie in the recourse to available verbal forms. We may state that Italian speakers use a richer verbal morphology than French and Russian speakers. In French and Italian oral productions similar to those in Esperanto, verbal morphology differs as well. Verbal morphology is more complex in Italian than in French, although the two languages are typologically very close. This complexity may be observed in the oral production of Italian speakers both in Italian and in Esperanto.

For Italian speakers, the marking of aspect, when it is necessary, lies in verbal means: compound forms are used to contrast events, especially in the case of simultaneous events. While Esperantophones whose L1 are a Romance language use active and passive participles, Russian speakers only use passive ones. Gerunds are used more frequently by Italian speakers.

In the spoken Esperanto of Russian speakers, verbal prefixation is often used as a means of marking the perfective aspect, as per the Russian model. Generally, while verbal prefixation affects mainly movement verbs in all of the speakers interviewed, Russian speakers exhibit a greater variety of prefixed verbs, including psychological verbs (such as *to see, to look, to hear*) and cognitive verbs (*to know, to think*). For Russian speakers, prefixation also affects infinitives: *havi* 'to have' imperfective vs. *ekhavi* 'to get' perfective, the prefix *ek-* serving officially to mark the beginning of an action: *ekkanti* 'to begin to sing'.

Temporality in Zamenhof's own writings

How did Zamenhof himself use morphology in Esperanto? Based on the first texts he wrote in this language, it is possible to deduce the implicit rules he followed while writing in a language that was only a few years young. Esperanto evolves and changes like any other living language. Even though,

on a methodological level, it is not appropriate to compare the writings of the founder of the language with recent oral production, the following examples are a good illustration of Zamenhof's logic in regard to his creation.

(2)   *Kaj la afero, kiu povus alporti utilon al ĉiu aparta adepto nur tiam,*
       se antaŭe jam ekzistus multego da aliaj adeptoj, trovis nenian akcept-
       anton kaj montriĝis malvive naskita. (1887; 1929:19)[4]
       And that which could be of use for any particular adept only when
       there already existed a great many adepts found no takers and proved
       itself to be stillborn.

In this example, the relationship of anteriority in the hypothetical structure is expressed through lexical means "X could bring . . . if previously (*antaŭe*) there already (*jam*) existed". The two verbs *to be able to* (*povus*) and *to exist* (*ekzistus*) are used in the conditional form. The passive past participle (according to Zamenhof's terminology) *naskita* 'born' has the value of the accomplished and of the past. The verb *montriĝis* 'to show itself, to reveal itself' is in the form of the past; logically, the participle *naskita* 'born' refers to an earlier period in relationship to the verb *montriĝis*, although it is not anteriority as such that is expressed here, but rather the accomplished character. This allows us to speak of the aspectual value of participles and not the temporal value, as stated by Zamenhof. Another example shows the dissociation in the marking of tense and aspect:

(3)   *. . . ke al li est**os** propon**ata** ia neefektivigebla utopio* (1887; 1929:17)
          . . . that an unachievable utopia will be offered to him

In (3), the verb *esti* 'to be' in the future form is accompanied by a passive participle, called present. In effect, in this case that refers to the future, the participle *proponata* 'offered' expresses the idea of something that will be in the process of being offered in the future. Examples (4) and (5) illustrate the use of a passive participle, called past, that has a perfective value:

(4)   *la lingvo est**os** fin**ita** kaj preta* (1887; 1929:23)
       the language will be completed and ready

(5)   *la enkonduko de unu komune akcept**ita** lingvo internacia* (1887; 1929:
       17–18)
       the introduction of one language commonly accepted as an inter-
       national language

When reading Zamenhof, we notice that there is an underlying attribution of aspectual values to participles. Although the *Fundamento* does not speak

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[4]The examples of Zamenhof's writings are taken from Zamenhof (1929). The first number in parenthesis refers to the date of the writing, while the second refers to the page number in his *Originala verkaro* (1929).

of verbal aspect, the writings of the creator of Esperanto reflect the logic of languages such as Polish or Russian in the treatment of participles and gerunds. As for the participles called future, their association with a simple verbal form (such as the present, the past and the future), in other words, in compound verbal tenses, remains rare. The active participle called future, is typically used as an adjective-attribute that refers to the future (examples (6a) and (6b)), while the passive participle called future is almost inexistent:

(6a) *... ĉiuj ven**ontaj** ... jaroj* (1917; 1929:358)
      all the years to come = all future years

(6b) *... la est**onta** kongreso* (1905; 1929:228)
      ... the future convention

We might have expected that the simple future in *-os* would be accompanied by participles (called future) that were introduced in the grammar in order to attain regularity. In reality though, these participles are difficult to use by speakers of Esperanto, since few languages have future participles. This explains the difficulty with which Esperantophones interpret these forms and integrate them into compound tenses. The tendency is therefore stable: participles and gerunds, called past, express perfective value (examples (7), (8) and (9b)) while those called present are imperfective (example (9a)):

(7)   *Kaj ĝi est**os** trair**inta** la juĝon de l'tuta mondo ...* (1887; 1929:23)
      And it will have made it through everyone's critique ...

(8)   *Kiam en mia urbo est**os** fond**ita** templo ...* (1906; 1929:320)
      When in my city a temple will be built ...

(9a) *La libro est**as** leg**ata**.*
      The book is (or is in the process of being) read.

(9b) *La libro est**as** leg**ita**.*
      The book is (already) read.

Verbal prefixation in Zamenhof's texts is mostly lexical. The later adoption of prefixation with an aspectual value could be interpreted as the result of research into the means of expression of verbal aspect by Esperantophones whose mother tongue specifies aspect in this way. It also reflects the evolution of the language as well as its flexibility and its capacity to adapt to the needs of its speakers. Another example confirms the evolutionary character of Esperanto. Zamenhof specifies that the suffixes of participles (cf. Table 1, columns 3 and 4) must not be combined with temporal endings (*-as, -is, -os*) or modal ending (*-us*). But usage has decided otherwise and mixed forms have evolved. Thus, usage gives us cases such as:

(10a) *Mi povin**tus** fari tion.*
      I could have done that.

which combines the expression of the conditional (*-us*) and of the past (*-int-*) next to the more classic forms which express the conditional (10b), (10c), as is the case in Russian (11a), (11b):

(10b) *Mi povus fari tion.*
       I could do that.

(10c) *Mi estus povinta fari tion.*
       I could have done that.

(11a) Я мог бы делать это. *Ya mog by delat' èto.*
       I could (IMPERFECTIVE) do (IMPERFECTIVE) that.
       I could do that.
       ⟨I could have do that⟩ (= I could have done that.)

(11b) Я мог бы сделать это. *Ya mog by sdelat' èto.*
       I could (IMPERFECTIVE) do (PERFECTIVE) that.
       I could do that.
       ⟨I could have do that⟩ (= I could have done that.)

The recourse to complex or mixed forms is justified in cases that are ambiguous on a temporal or aspectual level. It is actually only in these cases that we find this type of verbal form, contrary to the simple forms that are used the most often.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we wish to highlight the fact that Esperanto allows its speakers to make choices among the means offered by the language by following the logic of the mother tongue. In the absence of detailed explanations about grammatical rules, Zamenhof leaves the door open to creativity and freedom of expression. Could this be considered negligence on his part, or rather a marketing strategy of sorts, aimed at recruiting more speakers attracted by the simplicity of the grammar? Whatever the case, simplicity and flexibility are what have allowed Esperanto to continue to exist as well as to attract and keep its adepts. The multitude of usages of Esperanto and the acceptance of this variation on the part of speakers represent the distinctive characteristics of modern Esperanto. In this article, we chose to examine the variation with reference to the verbal system, but many other elements offer proof (the use of the article, the place of adjectives, syntax, pronunciation, recourse to affixes, etc.).

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