

Views on Esperanto in the Bahá'í faith: A revised subchapter in *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*

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Abstract. The question about a universal language and particularly about Esperanto is treated in a subchapter in the book *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, which is an officially sanctioned presentation about Bahá'í religion. In the original edition of 1923 the support for Esperanto was clearly expressed, because the leader of the religion, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, supported the idea about Esperanto as a Universal Language, and several times urged Bahá'ís to learn it. The author of the book, J. E. Esslemont, learned it and even practiced Esperanto on his deathbed.

Quotations, however, show that there was a discussion also about other planned languages among Bahá'ís.

In the editions of 1937, 1950 and 1970, the final part of the presentation about Esperanto was modified. The author shows that the reason of the change is that Esperanto in Bahá'í is associated with millenarian expectations of the “Most High Peace” and the “Coming of the Kingdom of God” in 1957. After this year Bahá'í religion rapidly grew in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Nonislamic Asia, where Esperanto was not well-known, and stagnated in Europe and North America, where Esperanto was better known. The milleniarism in the religion weakened and the work for the “Lesser Peace” was strengthened. This is supposed to be the result, not of a divine intervention, but of cooperation between states.

Resumo. Sintenoj al Esperanto en la Bahaa religio. Reviziita subĉapitro en *Bahá'u'lláh kaj la Nova Epoko*

La demando pri Universala lingvo kaj precipe pri Esperanto estas traktata en propra subĉapitro en la libro *Bahá'u'lláh kaj la Nova Epoko*, kiu estas oficiale

sankciita prezento pri Bahaismo. En la origina versio de 1923 la subteno por Esperanto klare esprimiĝis; la gvidanto de la religio, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, subtenis la ideon pri Esperanto kiel universala lingvo, kaj admonis al bahaanoj lerni la lingvon. La aŭtoro de la libro, J. E. Esslemont, lernis ĝin kaj eĉ mortonte praktikis Esperanton.

Citaĵoj tamen montras ke estis diskuto ankaŭ pri aliaj planlingvoj inter bahaanoj.

En la eldonoj de la libro de 1937, 1950 kaj 1970 la fino de la prezento de Esperanto estis modifita. La aŭtoro montras ke la kaŭzo de la ŝanĝo estas ke Esperanto en Bahaismo estis ligita al mileniisma atendado pri la “Plej Sankta Paco” kaj “Alveno de Dia Regno” en 1957. Post tiu jaro Bahaismo rapide disvastiĝis ĉefe en Latinameriko, subsahara Afriko kaj neislama Azio, kie Esperanto estis malmulte konata, kaj stagnis en Eŭropo kaj Nordameriko, kie Esperanto estis pli konata. La mileniismo en la religio malplifortiĝis kaj fortiĝis laboro por “Minora Paco”, kiu estos rezulto ne de dia interveno, sed de interŝtata kunlaboro.

1. Studies about Esperanto in Bahá'í

The need for an international language was early mentioned in scriptures of the Bahá'í¹ religion. Already the founder of the religion, Mírzá Ĥusayn-‘Alí Núrí, usually called Bahá'u'lláh, mentioned the idea several times in his books. In the 1920s appeared the book *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*.² In this book the author pays attention to Esperanto as a universal language. During the further history of Bahá'í, the religion, however, never officially made a final decision about the question which language should have the role as the universal language.

In 1973, Bahá'í Esperanto-League (BEL; in Esperanto *Bahaa Esperanto-Ligo*) was founded. It was founded with the approval of the Universal House of Justice and is an official organization of the Bahá'ís who are Esperantists. Its mission is to organize contact between Bahá'ís and Esperantists. To advocate the introduction of Esperanto as an international language of the Bahá'í community and of mankind is not an official task of BEL, but many of the members in BEL of course support Esperanto. When the second edition of the translation into Esperanto of the book *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* appeared in 1970, it was provided with an appendix “La Bahaa Esperanto-ligo kaj la Demando pri Esperanto” ‘The Bahá'í Esperanto-League and the question about Esperanto’ (BNE:eo1978:276-295). In 2014, the opinions expressed in this appendix are said to be the personal opinions of the author, but not of the community.

¹In this article the transliteration method of Persian words used in the Bahá'í community is used.

²Referred to as BNE in the sequel.

There are a number of doctoral theses and scientific articles about Bahá'í, for example in the journals *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* and *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*. There are also many articles about the role of Esperanto in Bahá'í, from the point of view of the Bahá'í believers. There are also discussions about revisions in *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* and about Bahá'í and Esperanto on Internet. However, as far as the author knows, there is neither any scientific study about the role of Esperanto in Bahá'í, nor about the role of *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* in Bahá'í. The present article is intended to be a contribution to diminishing this shortage.

2. *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* as authoritative text in Bahá'í

Bahá'í is a new monotheistic religion, founded by Mírzá Ḥusayn-‘Alí Núrí (1817–1892), usually called Bahá'u'lláh, in 19th-century Persia. He wrote many books, letters and prayers. Also his son and successor ‘Abbás Effendi, usually called ‘Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1921), was a diligent writer, and also made several speeches in different countries. Many of these speeches are published. These writings, together with some writings of Siyyid ‘Alí Muḥammad Shírází (1819–1850), often called Báb, predecessor of Bahá'u'lláh, are considered to be sacred and authoritative text in the Bahá'í religion. The expression “holy scriptures” is not expressively used in the Bahá'í movement, however, one sometimes uses the expression “sacred writings.” The sacred and authoritative texts are, unlike the Bible and the Quran, not published in a single volume. The homepage *Bahá'í Reference Library. Authoritative Writings and Guidance*³ explains:

In the middle of the 19th century, Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892)—the “Glory of God”—delivered a new Revelation from God to humanity. For four decades, thousands of verses, letters and books flowed from His pen, amounting to some 100 volumes of Sacred Writings. This collection offers the principal works of Bahá'u'lláh that have been translated into English.

This suggest that all written documents by Bahá'u'lláh are understood to belong to the revelation, but that there is also a smaller group of principal works, which are more central. The writings of Báb are said to “prepare the way for the coming of Bahá'u'lláh.” ‘Abdu'l-Bahá is said to be “the authorized interpreter” of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Also the works of Shoghi Effendi and messages of the Universal House of Justice are mentioned in the same homepage. They are neither explicitly described as “revelation,” nor

³This homepage was renewed while this article was written. During a period two different versions were available on the Internet.

as “authoritative.” The word *guidance* in the heading possibly refers to these writings (Bahá’í Reference Library. Authoritative Writings and Guidance 2014). Many Bahá’ís, probably the majority, however, consider the works of Shoghi Effendi and messages of the Universal House of Justice to be authoritative.

Because there are that many sacred and authoritative texts in Bahá’í, there has been a need for a comprehensive introduction to the religion. Such an introduction was written by J. E. Esslemont, with the title *Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era*.

This book has a position next to the sacred and authoritative texts. In the Bahá’í Reference Library online, *Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era* is published under the heading “Others,” which appears just under the works of Bahá’u’lláh, Báb, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, Universal House of Justice and Compilations [of works by these authors] (Bahá’í Reference Library 2013). The position of the book in the Bahá’í community is very strong, because it is considered as a good summary of the Bahá’í sacred and authoritative texts.

John Ebenezer Esslemont (1874–1925) was born in Aberdeen, Scotland. He was a medical doctor and spoke English, French, German, Spanish, and Esperanto, and later learned Persian and Arabic. In 1914 he met some friends who had met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, listened to them and loaned a few pamphlets about the religion. He became a Bahá’í in 1915. Esslemont “found considerable difficulty in obtaining the literature [he] wanted”, and began to write a more systematic book about the religion. He began to correspond with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, who invited him to Haifa. During the winter of 1919–1920 Esslemont spent two months there, and could discuss the book with him on various occasions.

Back home Esslemont revised his manuscript and sent it to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. It was translated into Persian and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá corrected the chapters I, II, V and a part of III before he passed away. The book was now called *Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era*. Also Shoghi Effendi and a committee of the National Bahá’í Assembly of England revised the book and then it was published in 1923 (BNE:en:1923:7–8). In 1922 Esslemont became one of the members of the first National Spiritual Assembly of England.

In November 1924, Dr. Esslemont left London to spend the winter in Haifa. He was, however, ill and had to stay in a hospital in Haifa for some time. The Bahá’í-missionary Martha Root met him in April 1924, when he lived in a house with other Bahá’ís. There he was cared for and studied Persian every evening. In the mornings he spoke in Esperanto with Martha Root. They for example discussed about the exact meaning of different words. In November 1925, Esslemont died of a stroke (Whitehead 1976:171–180). Shoghi Effendi (2006:499), leader of the Bahá’í faith during the period 1921–1957, in his own book *God Passes By*, approves the book with the words: “that

splendid, authoritative and comprehensive introduction to Bahá'í history and teachings, penned by that pure-hearted and immortal promoter of the Faith, J. E. Esslemont.”

3. Esperanto in *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*

In *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, chapter X is about “The Way to Peace” with a subchapter about “Universal Language.” In the different editions of the book the beginning of this subchapter is the same.⁴ The final part however was revised in different ways in the different editions. The purpose of this article is to examine how and why the final part of the subchapter was changed. First we will read the whole subchapter, and thereafter we will analyse it:

Universal Language

Having glanced at the principal causes of war and how they may be avoided, we may now proceed to examine certain constructive proposals made by Bahá'u'lláh with a view to achieving the Most Great Peace.

The first deals with the establishment of a universal auxiliary language. Bahá'u'lláh refers to this matter in the Book of Aqdas and in many of His Tablets. Thus in the Tablet of *Ishráqát* He says:—

“The Sixth *Ishráq* (Effulgence) is Concord and Union amongst men. Through the radiance of Union have the regions of the world at all times been illumined, and the greatest of all means thereunto is the understanding of one another's writing and speech. Ere this, in Our Epistles, have We commanded the Trustees of the House of Justice, either to choose one of the existing tongues, or to originate a new one, and in like manner to adopt a common script, teaching these to the children in all the schools of the world, that the world may become even as one land and one home.”

About the time when this proposal of Bahá'u'lláh was first given to the world, there was born in Białystok (now a town in Poland) a boy named Ludovic Zamenhof, who was destined to play a leading part in carrying it into effect. Almost from his infancy, the ideal of a universal language became a dominant motive in Zamenhof's life, and the result of his devoted labours was the invention and widespread adoption of the language known as Esperanto, which has now stood the test of many years and has proved to be a very satisfactory medium of international intercourse. It has the great advantage that it can be mastered in about a twentieth part of the time required to master such languages as English, French or German. At an Esperanto banquet given in Paris in February 1913, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá said:—

“Today one of the chief causes of the differences in Europe is the diversity of languages. We say this man is a German, the other is an Italian, then we

⁴In different editions there are however small differences in the use of punctuation marks. In this article the punctuation marks in the edition of 1923 are used. Quotation marks (“) are, for example, used in the beginning, but not in the end, of every paragraph in long quotations. These were omitted in later editions.

meet an Englishman and then again a Frenchman. Although they belong to the same race, yet language is the greatest barrier between them. Were a universal auxiliary language in operation they would all be considered as one.”

“His Holiness Bahá’u’lláh wrote about this international language more than forty years ago. He says that as long as an international language is not adopted, complete union between the various sections of the world will be unrealized, for we observe that misunderstandings keep people from mutual association, and these misunderstandings will not be dispelled except through an international auxiliary language.

“Generally speaking, the whole people of the Orient are not fully informed of events in the West, neither can the Westerners put themselves in sympathetic touch with the Easterners; their thoughts are enclosed in a casket—the international language will be the master key to open it. Were we in possession of a universal language, the Western books could easily be translated into that language, and the Eastern peoples be informed of their contents. In the same way the books of the East could be translated into that language for the benefit of the people in the West. The greatest means of progress towards the union of East and West will be a common language. It will make the whole world one home and become the strongest impulse for human advancement. It will upraise the standard of the oneness of humanity. It will make the earth one universal commonwealth. It will be the cause of love between the children of men. It will cause good fellowship between the various races.

“Now, praise be to God that Dr. Zamenhof⁵ has invented the Esperanto language. It has all the potential qualities of becoming the international means of communication. All of us must be grateful and thankful to him for this noble effort; for in this way he has served his fellowmen well. With untiring effort and self-sacrifice on the part of its devotees Esperanto will become universal. Therefore every one of us must study this language and spread it as far as possible so that day by day it may receive a broader 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 Esperanto will be adopted as the language of all the future international conferences and congresses, so that all people need acquire only two languages—one their own tongue and the other the international language. Then perfect union will be established between all the people of the world. Consider how difficult it is today to communicate with various nations. If one studies fifty languages one may yet travel through a country and not know the language. Therefore I hope that you will make the utmost effort, so that this language of Esperanto may be widely spread.⁶

The first 85 % of the subchapter about “Universal Language” in the chapter “The Way to Peace” which we read were the same in all editions of *Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era*. If we read further we will find that the final part of the

⁵It is of interest that Zamenhof’s daughter Lydia, became an active Bahá’í. (This footnote was inserted only in the edition of 1970.)

⁶The text in the chapter is the same until this place. There are however differences about punctuation marks

chapter was revised twice. We therefore have three different versions of the final part.

Editions of 1923 and 1927

While thus encouraging the spread of Esperanto, 'Abdu'l-Bahá realized that it would have to be developed, improved and expanded before it could meet all the requirements of a universal language. In one of his London talks he said:—

“The love and effort put into Esperanto will not be lost, 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.”—*'Abdu'l-Bahá in London*, p. 95.

The development of the Esperanto language is now proceeding under the guidance of an international “Lingva Komitato,” and year by year it is being enriched and its vocabulary enlarged by the addition of roots from different⁷ languages.

Editions of 1937 and 1950

While these allusions to Esperanto are specific and encouraging, it remains true that until the House of Justice has acted on the matter in accordance with Bahá'u'lláh's instruction the Bahá'í Faith is not committed to Esperanto nor to any other living or artificial tongue.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in fact, in a Tablet describing the “seven candles of unity,” places unity of language last, as if this ideal cannot be achieved until the world has attained the unity of nations, the unity of races and the unity of religions. It is therefore impossible during these transitional years to anticipate what will result when the selection of the universal secondary language becomes eventually possible.

Which language to adopt, and whether it is to be a natural or constructed one, is a decision which the nations of the world will have to make.

Edition of 1970

While these allusions to Esperanto are specific and encouraging, it remains true that until the House of Justice has acted on the matter in accordance with Bahá'u'lláh's instruction the Bahá'í Faith is not committed to Esperanto nor to any other living or artificial tongue. 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself said: “The love and effort put into Esperanto will not be lost, but no one person can construct a Universal Language.”—*'Abdu'l-Bahá in London*, p. 95.

Which language to adopt, and whether it is to be a natural or constructed one, is a decision which the nations of the world will have to make.

4. Analysis of the text in the editions of 1923 and 1927

In this section we will analyse how Esslemont in the subchapter “Universal Language” organizes the argumentation and that he supports the idea about Esperanto as the universal language of Bahá'í and the world.

⁷From BNE:en:1927 “different” was changed to “various”.

1. He states that Bahá'u'lláh has made certain constructive proposals to achieve “The Most Great Peace” and invites the readers to examine them.
2. He quotes Bahá'u'lláh, who “commanded the Trustees of the House of Justice, either to choose one of the existing tongues, or to originate a new one, and in like manner to adopt a common script, teaching these to the children in all the schools of the world, that the world may become even as one land and one home.”
3. He states that when Bahá'u'lláh said this, Ludwig Zamenhof, the creator of Esperanto, was born in Poland and that he was “destined to play a leading part in carrying it [the proposal of Bahá'u'lláh] into effect”.
4. He states that Esperanto “has proved to be a very satisfactory medium of international intercourse.”
5. He quotes a long speech of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Paris in February 1913, in which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá clearly supports Esperanto, and invites the Bahá'ís to spread the language.⁸
6. He states that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was encouraged by the spread of Esperanto, but realized that Esperanto must be developed. He quotes a speech of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London, in which he states that a universal language must be made by a council and contain words from different languages.
7. He states that there already is such a council, *Lingva Komitato*, and that the vocabulary of Esperanto every year is enlarged by roots from various languages.

It is remarkable that Esslemont in the version of 1923 did not quote ‘Abdu’l-Bahá chronologically. The speech of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London was made in 1911 (Esslemont 1978:69), but in spite of this, the quotation is made in the final part of the discourse of Esslemont. The speech in Paris was made in 1913. However this quotation appears before the quotation from London of 1911. The year 1911 is not mentioned in the text in BNE, but the visit in London occurred September 4–23, 1911 (‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1982).

⁸A similar invitation was made in Edinburgh on January 7th, 1913, when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá invited all Bahá'ís to learn Esperanto. A report about this was published in *The Christian Commonwealth* on January 15th, 1913 (Desailly 2003:33). Desailly (2003:43–47) shows that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in a number of speeches urges Bahá'ís to learn Esperanto. An example of this is the above quoted: “Therefore every one of us must study this language and spread it as far as possible [...]” He however never declares that Esperanto necessarily is the future universal language.

The reason why Esslemont did not quote 'Abdu'l-Bahá chronologically is probably that Esslemont wants to answer possible objections among the readers. He begins with the well-known quotations supporting Esperanto. The quotation from the Paris speech of 'Abdu'l-Bahá is a long and clear support to Esperanto. This is followed by a quotation by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, which could be interpreted as a criticism on Esperanto: "no one person can construct a universal language, it must be made by a council and must contain words from different languages." Finally Esslemont shows that there already is such a council, *Lingva Komitato*,⁹ which ensures that Esperanto grows with words from various languages.

In the editions of 1923 and 1927 of *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, J. E. Esslemont shows his conviction that Esperanto is the most suitable candidate for the role as a common language, which, according to Bahá'u'lláh, should be taught to the children in all the schools in the world. He also quotes speeches of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the question to show that Esperanto fulfills the expectations of Bahá'u'lláh on a universal language. 'Abdu'l-Bahá in fact thanks God for Dr. Zamenhof and Esperanto, which shows that he acknowledges that Esperanto is not just a human invention, but an emanation of God's will.

J. E. Esslemont also shows his support for Esperanto in the fact that he himself learned the language and practiced it regularly, even on his deathbed. He clearly supports the language also in the pamphlet *Bahá'u'lláh and his message*, edited on the occasion of the Conference on some living religions within the British Empire in London. Esslemont ([1924]¹⁰:14) writes:

International Auxiliary Language

As a further means to the unity of mankind Bahá'u'lláh urged the adoption of an international language. He advised that the International House of Justice should either choose one of the existing languages or originate a new one, and in like manner adopt a common script, teaching these to the children in all the schools of the world, that the world may become as one land and one home. ("Tablet of *Ishráqát*".) This idea is not to do away with the various national languages, but that each child should learn the international language in addition to its mother tongue. Since Bahá'u'lláh advocated this principle, Esperanto has been given to the world. 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke highly in favour of Esperanto, saying it had the necessary qualities to form the basis of the international language in the future, and urging his followers to study this language and encourage its adoption.

⁹ *Lingva komitato* 'Language Committee', an independent linguistic committee with the task to conserve and protect the fundamental principles of Esperanto and to follow the evolution of the language. The Committee in 1948 merged with *Akademio de Esperanto*.

¹⁰ Year according to Moomen (1995).

5. The answer about the language to be chosen

We have to look closer to the quotation from the speech of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London in 1911. The full discourse is quoted in the book *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London* as below:

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 Committee 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 1982)

We shall examine the statement of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá line by line:

- *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 Committee representing all countries [...]:* In the text we can see that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is convinced that the universal language to be is a planned language. When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that the love and effort put into Esperanto would not be lost, this suggests that the future universal language will contain traits from Esperanto, or that it would be a modified form of Esperanto.

In 1907, a committee consisting of scientists of different disciplines published the language Ido, which was a reformed version of Esperanto. Until the 1920s, Ido was a real competitor with Esperanto for the role as a universal language. We can suppose that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá knew about the existence of Ido, and about its history. The “friend” mentioned in the text probably was interested in the question whether Esperanto or Ido would become the universal language, because Bahá’u’lláh had spoken about a “formed” language, and Esperanto and Ido were the main planned languages known in the 1910s. The saying however shows that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, probably had heard some of the criticism against Esperanto formulated by Idists. The main example of that is that one person cannot construct a language, but that it must be made by a committee. During the *Exposition Universelle* of 1900 in Paris, a committee, *Délégation pour l’Adoption d’une Langue Auxiliaire Internationale*, was founded with the task to elect the future world language. In 1907, the French Esperantist Louis de Beaufront made a proposal for a reformed version of Esperanto, called Ido, according to the pseudonym of its author (cf. footnote 1

on page 8). In 1908, a reformed version of Ido was published. However, the majority of the Esperantists remained adherents of classical Esperanto.

- *and must contain words from different languages:* Esperanto and Ido in almost the same way contain words from different languages. There is, however, a tendency in Ido to prefer words from Romance languages.
- *It will be governed by the simplest rules, and there will be no exceptions:* The grammars of Esperanto and Ido are very similar. It can be discussed which one is more simple. There are not any exceptions in either of the languages.
- *neither will there be gender:* The opinion that there must be no gender in the universal language can be a reflection of criticism against Esperanto. In Ido there are many different personal pronouns. If one wants to use a pronoun, which shows gender, that is possible, but it is also possible to use a pronoun without gender:

ilu or *il* 'he, him';

elu or *el* 'she, her';

olu or *ol* 'it';

lu 'he, she' or 'it' (de Beaufront 1925:32–33).

There are however other possible explanations. Persian, the mother tongue of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, has no grammatical gender concerning nouns. Therefore, it might have been seen as superfluous and complicated to 'Abdu'l-Bahá to use gender nouns in Esperanto. Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá early supported women's emancipation. This can also be a reason why the use of gender nouns seemed to be an unnecessary way to emphasize the differences between the sexes.

- *nor extra and silent letters:* In Esperanto there are some extra letters—*ĉ*, *ĝ*, *ĥ*, *ĵ*, *ŝ*, and *ŭ*—used for sounds not represented by letters in the Latin alphabet. Ido used another solution: *Ch* and *sh* were used for two sounds without letters. The expression “nor extra and silent letters” can allude to a discussion about different methods to write sounds without the use of special letters.¹¹
- *Everything indicated will have but one name. In Arabic there are hundreds of names for the camel!:* The intention of the author of Esperanto, Ludwig Zamenhof, was that every phenomenon should have just one name. The creators of Ido probably had the same intention. Esperanto, however, was used in many different countries, and also as home language in Esperanto speaking families. No one could control the evolution of the language. Therefore, Esperanto got synonyms.
- *In the schools of each nation the mother tongue will be taught, as well as the revised Universal Language:* This statement is similar to the proposal in the

¹¹“Silent letters” can also allude to such letters in national languages.

League of Nations, discussed during the period 1920–1925 (see p. 55). The idea of Esperantists and Idists was that their language should not replace the national languages, but be taught together with them. The expression “revised Universal Language” cannot be understood as a direct support for Ido, because Ido was not mentioned in the speech. Stojan (1929:520–526) published texts in 64 planned languages. Some of these existed already in 1911. It must be understood as a sign that he had listened to the discussions among Esperantists, Idists and perhaps to supporters of other planned languages, and thought that a compromise between the different ideas would be possible.

Two years later, in his speech in Paris in 1913, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá clearly showed that he supported Esperanto. There can be two reasons to this. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá could have become convinced that Esperanto was naturally changed and revised, because it was in practical use. It had much more adherents than all the other constructed languages together. Probably the number of Esperantists, and meetings with Esperantists in many places he visited are another reason.

Therefore Esslemont omitted the last lines from the talk about Esperanto with the “friend” in London, which could be interpreted as arguments for radical reforms in Esperanto or the creation of a new universal language.

6. Analysis of the text in the editions of 1937, 1950 and 1970

Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era was revised three times. The revision of 1937 was a major one. In the preface of the 1937 edition, the revision is explained: “the author’s views, some of them written prior to 1921, no longer, on certain aspects of the subject, correspond to the evolutionary character of the Faith.”

Shoghí Effendí Rabbání (1897–1957), Guardian of the Bahá’í faith, oversaw the revision.

The revision of 1950 was a smaller one: “This edition does not displace the text as it has appeared since major revision was made in the book under the direction of the Guardian of the Faith in 1937 [...]” (BNE:en:1970:vii).

The revision of 1970 was again a major one: “the diffusion and development of the Bahá’í Faith since that time [1937] has been tremendous. [...] It has therefore been deemed necessary to bring the book up to date in order to maintain its usefulness for modern readers. This has been done with a minimum of alteration to the text, and chiefly by the use of footnotes and of an epilogue [...]” (BNE:en:1970:ix).

In the editions of 1937 and 1950, the discussion about the need of a council which should construct a universal language was omitted, together with the assertion that there already was such a council: *Lingva komitato*. The reason of this change was that the majority of intellectual Europeans and North

Americans already forgot Ido and other world language candidates. The only planned world language candidate generally known was Esperanto.

The final part of the subchapter in the editions of 1937 and 1950 can be analysed:

6. The House of Justice however is not committed to Esperanto or to any other language.
7. The unity of language cannot be achieved until the unity of nations, the unity of races and the unity of religions is achieved.
8. It is therefore impossible to anticipate the future decision about a Universal Language.

The reference to the tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá describing the “seven candles of unity,” which places unity of language last, is an attempt to postpone the decision about international language to the future. However, it is remarkable that the preface to the edition of 1950 (the same book!) asserts that Shoghi Effendi had written that the “seven lights” (candles) will not necessary appear in the order given” (BNE:en:1950:ix). In later editions (from 1970) of *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, the first 87% in the subchapter about Universal Language are still exactly the same as the corresponding text in the 1923 edition. The last paragraphs, however, contain a totally revised message. The points 1–5 in the analysis above are the same in later editions. However the final part is another:

6. The House of Justice however is not committed to Esperanto or to any other language.
7. The nations of the world will have to decide which language will be adopted as a universal language.

The text about Universal Language in the 1970 edition was changed, although it was explicitly stated in the preface that the revision was made “with a minimum of alteration to the text.” This makes it clear that the change in the text about Esperanto did not occur by chance, but was a result of a process, suggested in the text with the words *tremendous development and usefulness for modern readers*.

7. The reasons for the changes in the text

Why did Esperanto get its own subchapter in the 1923 edition of BNE? As stated above, the book was written by J. E. Esslemont, who spent two months

in Haifa and who discussed the book with 'Abdu'l-Bahá. We therefore have to assume that Esslemont and 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke about Esperanto, among other themes.

'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1921) was the eldest son of Bahá'u'lláh and the leader of the Bahá'í faith. He primarily wrote in Persian and Arabic, but there are also some writings in Ottoman Turkish. He made several journeys to promote the faith. He visited for example France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, Hungary and Egypt (BNE:1923-53-69), which were countries with existing Bahá'í communities. These missionary journeys were very important in the history of Bahá'í.

With the travels, Bahá'í became an even more international religion. 'Abdu'l-Bahá brought new topics into the revelations of his father. He increased references to Christianity and reduced references to Islam (Hutter 2005:738). The reason was that he met many Christians in Europe and had many conversations with them.

During these journeys he made several speeches in Persian, which were interpreted to the local language. Esslemont states that his talks and addresses therefore lost much of their beauty, although the people who listened were impressed (BNE:en:1923:61, 67). We therefore can assume that 'Abdu'l-Bahá experienced the lack of a universal language. During his travels he was dependent of interpreters and could not have any direct conversations with the people he met in the countries visited. Therefore 'Abdu'l-Bahá wholeheartedly supported the idea about a universal language. (BNE:en:1923:145-146.)

After some doubts whether the universal language should be Esperanto or Ido, in the speech in London 1911, he in Paris 1913 seems to have come to the conclusion that the universal language should be Esperanto.

After the death of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Esperanto continued to get support from the new leader of the Bahá'í faith. Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957) was the grandchild of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and his successor as leader of the Bahá'í faith: sometimes called the Guardian and appointed head. He was educated at *Frères des Écoles chrétiennes* in Haifa, in the Syrian Protestant College (later known as the American University of Beirut) and in Balliol College in Oxford. He was fluent in Persian, Turkish, Arabic, French and English. Shoghi Effendi had the role of an organizer of the Faith (Shoghi Effendi 2014). During the leadership of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the organization was weak and Shoghi Effendi established the administrative and institutional structure of the religion.

Shoghi Effendi supported the work for Esperanto in Bahá'í. He for example encouraged Lidia Zamenhof, the daughter of Ludwig Zamenhof, initiator of Esperanto, in her work for Bahá'í and Esperanto. He hoped that she, after her trip to America, could go to Iran to teach Esperanto to the Iranian

Bahá'ís.¹² Desailly (2003:43–44) shows that Shoghi Effendi several times requests Bahá'ís to learn Esperanto. However, he did not consider the order to teach Esperanto to be an obligation in the same way as the duty to pray.

Why was the text about Esperanto changed in the book *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* in the editions of 1937, 1950 and 1970? One possibility is that the weakened role of Esperanto since the 1920s is a reason. In 1920–1925 the question about an international language was discussed in the League of Nations. In 1920, eleven delegates proposed that the League of Nations accept a resolution stating that it hoped that education of Esperanto should become more common in the world, and that all children should learn two languages: The mother tongue and an easy instrument/means for international communication. Especially France loudly protested about the proposal. A new proposal was made in 1921 with the support of delegates from twelve countries. This and other proposals were discussed. In 1923 the Committee on Intellectual Co-operation, however, rejected a proposal with a recommendation about education in Esperanto in the schools, and about Esperanto as an official language in the League of Nations. In 1924 Esperanto, however, was accepted as a clear language in telegraphy (Lapenna et al. 1974:748–758). The setback of Esperanto in the League of Nations did not stop the Esperanto movement to be an influential movement which attracted a lot of attention in the 1930s. There were, however, also exceptions. Esperanto activities were forbidden in the Soviet Union and in Nazi Germany during the 1930s and 1940s, and Esperantists were even murdered. Even the new Japanese religion, Ómoto, which got its interest in Esperanto from Bahá'í missionaries, during the Japanese nationalism in the 1930s diminished its interest in Esperanto (Nordenstorm 2002:65–66).

The Second World War, however, was a major setback to the hope that Esperanto as a universal language would be a way to world peace and understanding among different nations. After the war, English, which was the language of the United Kingdom and the United States, which emerged victorious from the war, became more used as an international language. Its esteem grew also because of the popularity of American movies and the knowledge of English was spread as a result of British colonialism. These were the reasons why English replaced German as the first foreign language in Swedish schools in 1946. The situation in other countries was similar.

The author, however, finds the most important reasons for the change inside the Bahá'í religion. The main causes for the changes in the texts about Universal language and Esperanto seems to be the death of Shoghi Effendi in 1957, the failed prophecy about Coming of the Kingdom of God in 1957 and the growth of Bahá'í in the 1960s.

¹²For a biography of Lidia Zamenhof, see Heller (1985; 2007).

In 1957, Shoghi Effendi, the last of the hereditary Bahá'í leaders, died during a visit to London. He left no will and had no successor, having no children and having excluded his siblings and cousins. A group of 27 persons, "Hands of the Cause of God" therefore came to power. The collective leadership became even stronger in 1963, when the Universal House of Justice was established. The support for Esperanto in the new collective leadership was not as strong as the support shown by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi.

The period 1957–1988 was characterized by a large quantitative growth of the Bahá'í religion. The religion also developed from a religion spread in the Islamic heartland, in Europe, and in North America, to a religion with the majority of its adherents in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa and non-Islamic Asia.

The number of adherents rose from a little more than a million at the end of the 1960s to six million by the end of the century. In Europe and North America the number of adherents was stagnant (Hutter 2005:739). Europe and North America were also the places where Esperanto had most supporters.

Most of the new Bahá'ís were poorly educated and the national Bahá'í communities experienced difficulties in consolidating the faith of the new adherents. The idea about a universal language apparently was not considered as the most important idea when one organized education about Bahá'í theology.

There were also many changes in the theology. The millenarianism shaded into more general hopes for the establishment of millennial bliss. With other words the "Most Great Peace" foretold by Bahá'u'lláh, and mentioned in the subchapter about universal language in BNE, shaded off into the "Lesser Peace," a politically based world peace established by treaties. The hope for "Kingdom of God" shaded off into social reformism. The belief in the unique role of the Bahá'í faith began to coexist with the belief in the guidance of God for all mankind. (Smith & Momen 1989:63–91.)

There is also another chapter in BNE where universal language is mentioned, and which was changed in the 1970 edition. In the early editions of BNE there is a subchapter with the heading "Coming of the Kingdom of God." The subchapter describes a prediction by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá about "the speedy triumph of spirituality over materiality and the consequent establishment of the Most Great Peace." The coming of the Kingdom of God is predicted to 1957 A.D.:

As the Hijrat occurred in 622 A.D. the date referred to is, therefore, 1957 (i.e., 622 + 1335) A.D. Asked: "What shall we see at the end of the 1335 days?" he replied:— "Universal Peace will be firmly established, a Universal language promoted. Misunderstandings will pass away. The Bahá'í Cause will

be promulgated in all parts and the oneness of mankind established. It will be most glorious!" (BNE:en:1927:286–289)

The year 1957 is the sum of the year of Hijra 622 A.D. and the number 1335, mentioned in the Bible in Daniel 12:12.

This prophecy, which was not realized in 1957, was reinterpreted in BNE:en:1970. Now it is said that:

Many have been the attempts of learned students to solve the problem of the significance of these words. In a tabletalk at which the writer was present, 'Abdu'l-Bahá reckoned the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy from the date of the beginning of the Muḥammadan Era.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets make it clear that this prophecy refers to the one hundredth anniversary of the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdád, or the year 1963.¹³ (BNE:en:1970:249–251)

The final part of the subchapter is totally changed. The mention "that Universal Language will be established, Universal Language promoted and the Bahá'í Cause promulgated in all parts and the oneness of mankind established" is omitted. It is likely that the reinterpretation of the "Coming of the Kingdom of God" with the omission of the mention about Universal Language established, also made the editors to change other references to universal language and Esperanto in BNE:1970. This can be an explanation why the final part of the subchapter Universal language was changed.

The idea about Esperanto as a universal language for Bahá'í and the world was presented by Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi in a situation when the Bahá'í movement consisted of persons in the Levant, in Europe and in North America, the latter mostly well educated, and when Esperanto had a role in the millenarian expectations about the "Most Great Peace." In the post-1957 Bahá'í, practical tools were immediately needed for communication with the great numbers of new adherents in Latin America, Africa and non-Islamic Asia. The tool elected was translation. The 1970 edition of BNE was translated into 40 languages up to 1976 (BNE:sv:10). The idea about Universal language seemed to be too millenarian and therefore not relevant. Therefore it was toned down in BNE:en:1970.

However, we cannot just explain why some paragraphs in BNE about Universal language and Esperanto were changed in the editions of 1937, 1950 and 1970. We also have to examine why the main part of these texts remained untouched. The most important cause of this is that the idea about a universal language is mentioned in writings of Bahá'u'lláh and therefore a part of the revelation. The birth of Ludovic Lazar Zamenhof, creator of Esperanto, at the same time as the writings of Bahá'u'lláh also was interpreted as an important

¹³In 1963 the Universal House of Justice was established, which was a milestone in the history of Bahá'í.

sign. The speeches of 'Abdu'l-Bahá about Esperanto are not considered to be revelations, but nevertheless are held in esteem. The role of Lidia Zamenhof, the daughter of Ludwig Zamenhof, can be another cause that Esperanto has a defined role in the teaching of Bahá'í, which was shown by the insertion of a footnote (see footnote 5 on page 46) in the edition of BNE of 1970: "It is of interest that Zamenhof's daughter, Lydia, became an active Bahá'í." The distinction between "Most Great Peace" and "Lesser Peace" enables the solution to seek practical solutions for international communication in our time and at the same time keep the door open for the use of Esperanto in a distant future.

8. Conclusions

The author has shown that:

1. The statements about Esperanto in the 1923 edition of *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* were based on the fact that 'Abdu'l-Bahá several times urged Bahá'ís to learn Esperanto. The main quotation is from a speech in Paris in 1913.
2. In the final part of the subchapter about Universal Language in the 1923 edition of BNE, Esslemont quotes 'Abdu'l-Bahá from a speech in London 1911. The reason of this reversed quotation is that Esslemont wants to meet possible objections about Esperanto from the readers and to show that there already is a *Lingva Komitato*, a council working with the development of Esperanto.
3. The quotation from London, which Esslemont uses, however most likely reflects a discussion whether Esperanto or Ido was the best candidate for the role as Universal language.
4. The final part of the subchapter about a Universal Language was revised in the editions of 1937, 1950 and 1970 because millennialism shaded off in Bahá'í after the death of Shoghi Effendi in 1957
5. The final acceptance of Esperanto or another Universal Language was associated with the "Most Great Peace" and the "Coming of the Kingdom of God," foretold to 1957. After the death of Shoghi Effendi in the same year, the meaning of "Coming of the Kingdom of God" was reinterpreted.
6. Bahá'í in the 1960s was in a very expansive phase. Most new adherents were non-educated people in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa and

Non-Islamic Asia, while Bahá'í stagnated in Europe and North America, where Esperanto was more commonly known.

7. The main part of the subchapter about a Universal Language was not touched in the revised editions of *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*. This shows that Esperanto, since Esslemont wrote the book, has had a role in the teaching of Bahá'í.

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