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The Subtext of “Neŭtraleco”

The Dreyfus Affair and the Esperanto Movement

Abstract: Circa 1900 the Esperanto movement was centered in a France polarized by the Dreyfus Affair. The movement’s public documents never mention the Affair. Its leaders spoke of the need to maintain Esperanto’s neutrality on politics and religion in language that carried a subtext of the Affair. Private correspondence among prominent Esperantists reveals their factional split on the Affair and their desire to maintain Esperanto’s broad appeal in France. Their public discussion of *neŭtraleco*, in coded language, indicates their silence on the Affair was not by unanimous choice. The documents cited in this paper reveal the factional divide and power struggle that motivated the 1907 Ido schism. This research focuses on elite French Esperantists and complements work by historians who have focused on Zamenhof’s thinking. It includes research on *Espero Pacifista* and *Espero Katolika*, which few have studied. This research complements other work on *L’Espérantiste* by focusing on the Affair.

Keywords: Esperanto; Dreyfus Affair; Zamenhof; de Beaufront; Anti-Semitism.

1 A divided France

In 1900, the Esperanto movement was gaining steam and influence in France while the Dreyfus Affair polarized the nation’s intellectual community. Yet the Esperanto movement’s public documents never mention the Affair. Instead, Esperantist speeches and journals from the period stress the need to maintain total neutrality on politics and religion. The movement’s silence on the Affair is the result of division among its elites. Private letters among prominent Esperantists reveal that their insistence on the movement’s neutrality arose from concern over the Affair and desire to maintain broad appeal in a polarized France.

The Dreyfus Affair began when a Jewish military officer was wrongly accused of treason in 1894. The accusation ignited a yearslong scandal that left an indelible mark on French political society, as documented in Jean-Denis Bredin’s 1983 book *L’affaire*. Captain Alfred Dreyfus was convicted on forged evidence and imprisoned on Devil’s Island in 1895. After years of scandalous revelations and national debate, Dreyfus was pardoned

and released from prison in 1899. Even after Dreyfus's release, French intellectuals kept debating whether to formally exonerate him. Even some who believed in Dreyfus's innocence argued that admitting the Army's error would discredit and weaken the military while France was on the brink of war with Germany. Even after the treachery's true culprit was identified in 1898, Dreyfus was not exonerated until July 1906.

During the 1890s, or Esperanto's "French period" (Lins 2016, 18), France had more Esperantists than any other country (Schor 2016, 77). Elite French Esperantists enjoyed great influence over the global movement and Esperanto's creator Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof. The Affair created pressure to depoliticize the language, hide Zamenhof's Jewish identity, and bury Zamenhof's ideological dream for the language (Garvía 2015, 78). Zamenhof had conceived Esperanto as a tool to unite all humanity, with an attendant ideology, and even an inter-religion. French elites wanted otherwise. They saw Esperanto as "a practical invention, more like a telegraph by means of which one could send any message" (Kiselman 2008, 53).

One did not have to be an anti-Semite to realize that Zamenhof's Jewishness was a public-relations liability in France, during a time when violent anti-Jew demonstrations were common (Birnbaum 1998, 251-285) and Édouard Drumont's *France juive* had achieved bestseller status by blaming Jews for every ill in society (Winock 1990, 118). Given France's anti-Semitic fervor at the time, the most fatal mistake Zamenhof could make in France was to let people know he was a Jew.

Prominent French Esperantists were divided on the Dreyfus Affair and took pains to keep the movement neutral on it. Their speeches and publications never mention the Affair. Instead they debated how to define their *neŭtraleco* – the Esperanto word for "neutrality." They emphasized a stance of *neŭtraleco* on all political and social matters, and often discussed this stance in coded language that evoked the public Dreyfus debate. Factional strife, revealed in their private correspondence, motivated their insistence on *neŭtraleco*. This division set the stage for the 1907 schism that would fracture the Esperanto movement forever. Some, particularly Dreyfusards, defined this *neŭtraleco* in a fashion that would allow them to continue to advocate for other causes, such as pacifism and Dreyfus's exoneration. Others, particularly anti-Dreyfusards, defined *neŭtraleco* as a duty for Esperantist leaders to avoid controversial public stances, out of fear that their positions might become associated with the language. Zamenhof had a different definition of *neŭtraleco*, as a new ideology in its own right, which he wanted to spread worldwide (Forster 1982, 105). This research focuses on the French Esperantist elite's public debates and private schemes. It is intended to complement the work of other historians who have focused on

Zamenhof’s thinking, such as Marjorie Boulton’s *Zamenhof, aŭtoro de Esperanto*, Peter Forster’s *The Esperanto Movement* (1982) and Edmond Privat’s *Vivo de Zamenhof* (1937/2007).

Esperanto was entwined with Jewish identity from its inception. In 1887 Jewish ophthalmologist Zamenhof published his international language, founded on an “*interna ideo*” (“inner idea”): that a neutral language would make way for peace and mutual understanding among nations (Forster 1982, 70). Zamenhof downplayed his Jewish heritage, yet the universalist elements of Jewish culture had profoundly influenced him (Tonkin 1987, 73). In 1901 Zamenhof anonymously published a pamphlet in Russia detailing a “*pure religion universelle ... sous le vêtement extérieur du judaïsme actuel*” (“pure universal religion ... under the exterior clothing of modern Judaism,” Zamenhof 1995, 41). Originally called *Hilelismo* after first-century BC Rabbi Hillel, it was renamed *Homaranismo* (“Humanitism”) in 1913. Zamenhof dreamed that his universal language and religion together would transcend factions and create a supranationality (Zamenhof 1995, 19).

La Société française pour la propagation de l’espéranto advised Zamenhof that a universal Judaism would be coldly received in France. They persuaded Zamenhof not to publish his pamphlet on Esperanto’s attendant universal religion in France at the time (Lins 2016, 26-27). Zamenhof assented, as he did not wish to compromise Esperanto in the eyes of those who found his religious views uncongenial (Boulton 1962, 126). Zamenhof’s pamphlet was not published in France until 1906, the year Dreyfus was exonerated.

2 The Société’s opposing camps

La Société française pour la propagation de l’espéranto was divided on the Dreyfus Affair. Its leadership included two Army officers who publicly supported Dreyfus. General Hippolyte Sebert, president of the Esperanto Language Committee, would later sit on the commission who concluded that evidence against Dreyfus had been forged (Zamenhof 1995, 89). Also on the Language Committee was Gaston Moch, a Jewish former artillery officer who resigned from the Army in 1894 to become a prominent Dreyfusard and pacifist (Zamenhof 1995, 80). Émile Javal, a Jewish ophthalmologist and former National Assembly member, became a prominent Dreyfusard and Zamenhof’s closest confidant (Garvía 2015, 117). Correspondence suggests that logician Louis Couturat and mathematician Léopold Leau, close collaborators who would later become prominent Idists, were Dreyfusards (de Beaufront 1900, 17 novembre; 1901b, 3 juin; 1904b, 3 juin).

The Société's most infamous anti-Dreyfusard was its first president Louis de Beaufront, whom historian Edmond Privat credited as Esperanto's most prolific promoter in France (Privat 1927, 63), who would become infamous when he took credit for founding Ido in 1907. De Beaufront, a prodigious social climber with mysterious origins, recruited influential members, got Esperanto books published, and owned and edited the Société's official journal *L'Espérantiste* (Gordin 2015, 122). His work earned him the moniker "the St. Paul of Esperanto" (Guérard 1922, 116). De Beaufront insisted that Esperanto remain free of political or religious affiliation and discouraged Zamenhof from publishing his vision for Hilelismo at all. Mathematician Carlo Bourlet, who became the Paris Esperanto Group's first president in 1901, was also anti-Dreyfusard (Privat 1927, 77). Correspondence suggests that philosopher Émile Boirac was anti-Dreyfusard (Zamenhof 1988, 29). De Beaufront feuded with Moch so much that Gaston Waringhien wrote that "Antipation de Beaufront kontraŭ Moch kaŭzis, ke Moch estis Dreyfusano" (de Beaufront's antipathy against Moch was caused by Moch being a Dreyfusard," Waringhien 1948, 24).

During the 1890s, Zamenhof agreed to keep the movement neutral, even if it meant significantly suppressing his idealistic vision. Zamenhof distanced himself from the most zealous Esperantists by not discussing the notion that the language could unite all mankind as a single people. In 1898 Zamenhof wrote that Esperanto would not negate or destroy national languages, and in 1900 de Beaufront read this essay to the congress of the French Association for the Advancement of Science (Lins 2016, 20). Lins wisely advises that this text should be understood as expressing Zamenhof and de Beaufront's shared belief of the most suitable way to advocate for Esperanto in France at the time (Lins 2016, 20). Zamenhof believed that Esperanto's success in France was possible due to the French government's official pacifist stance at the time. Knowing that political winds could soon blow the other way, Zamenhof wanted to take advantage of that moment (Privat 1937, 98).

In 1901 the Esperantist and Dreyfusard movements looked on course to combine. Dreyfusards recruited both Esperantists and Dreyfusards simultaneously. In January 1901, Leau wrote that French physicist and physician André Broca would collect signatures for a petition on Dreyfus's case and that he would give Broca material to learn Esperanto (Leau 1901). This letter substantiates the very real possibility that the movements could become entangled. It also supports historian Fabian de Kloe's conclusion that Couturat (who worked closely with Leau) must have been a Dreyfusard (De Kloe 2013, 118).

De Beaufront found Bourlet’s recruitment practices dangerous (de Beaufront 1901a, 30 janvier). Writing to Bourlet in February 1901 about his distaste for Moch, de Beaufront argued the movement should remain neutral on questions of war and religion, and particularly on the Affair. “ni estas, kiel esperantistoj, nek pacemuloj, nek batalemuloj, nek katolikoj, kristanoj, judoj k.t.p.; ni estas tute kaj vere neŭtralaj, restante individuoj tio, kion mi volas,”¹ he wrote (“we are, as Esperantists, neither pacifists, nor militant, nor Catholics, Christians, Jews, etc.; we are completely and truly neutral, remaining individuals—this is what I want,” de Beaufront in Zamenhof 1988, 11). He added, “nia neŭtraleco estas por la afero kondiĉo esenca de sukceso” (“our neutrality is an essential condition of success for the cause,” de Beaufront in Zamenhof 1988, 11). De Beaufront, whose strategy for promoting Esperanto in France relied on recruiting the influential (Forster 1982, 76), wanted to maintain its broad appeal to all French intellectuals, regardless of political sympathies.

To maintain public neutrality, the leaders needed to carefully guard their own public opinions. De Beaufront writes in the same letter that he had stayed tight-lipped about his own sympathies: he describes himself and other leaders as “*very* devout practicing patriotic Catholics,” and explains that they have avoided publicly stating their opinions on controversial matters. “ni nenion kaj neniam parolas se ne *pri Esperanto* en nia revuo kaj en la direktado de la societo” (“we do not ever talk about anything but Esperanto in our magazine and in the management of the society,” de Beaufront in Zamenhof 1988, 11). As Zamenhof began publicizing his religious ideas in France, de Beaufront grew more anxious about maintaining Esperanto’s appeal to French conservatives.

De Beaufront and Bourlet plotted to keep the Dreyfusards out of power in the movement. In a 21 February 1901 letter, de Beaufront claimed to have essentially dictated the text of Moch’s pro-Esperanto pamphlet “broŝureto 122”:

tute inter ni du la verko estis inspirita kaj preskaŭ diktita de mi al li, ĉar kiam li ekkonis esperanton li parolis pri ŝanĝoj, pri plibonigoj (en sia opinio) k.t.p. mi tre timis ke li entreprenu bataladon danĝeran por ni. tial mi komunikis al li multe da dokumentoj, da notoj kaj inspiris al li la penson de lia broŝuro, kies ideojn mi diris kaj ripetis. li do faris ĝin; tiel mi kaptis lin en lia kaptilo, ĉar post la broŝuro li estis nia, li ne povis plu malutili al ni. jen la maniero kiel katolika patrioto venkis hebreon kaj el ebla malamiko faris amikon por la ideo (de Beaufront in Zamenhof 1988, 11).

1 The editor of Zamenhof’s collected works, Itô Kanzi (pseudonym, Ludovikito), changed all texts to a lower-case-only spelling.

[Completely between the two of us, the work was inspired and almost dictated by me to him, because when he got to know Esperanto he talked about changes, about improvements (in his opinion) etc. I was very afraid that he would undertake a fight dangerous for us. Therefore I provided him many documents and notes and inspired him with the thought of his pamphlet, whose ideas I said and repeated. So he did it; thus I caught him in his trap, because after the pamphlet he was ours, he could no longer harm us. This is how a Catholic patriot defeated a Jew and turned a potential enemy into a friend for the idea.]

De Beaufront's self-description as 'a Catholic patriot defeating a Jew' is typical of the era's anti-Semitic rhetoric. De Beaufront alludes to Zamenhof's utopian idea, indicating that he shared this vision at the time. His reference to Moch as a "possible enemy" underscores his belief that public Dreyfusard affiliation would harm the Esperanto movement.

In ongoing correspondence, de Beaufront laid out plans to use Moch and the other Dreyfusards as a defense against any public accusation that the Esperanto movement was anti-Dreyfusard or anti-Semitic:

pri moch diru bone al kiu ajn parolus al vi pri li, ... sed inter ni, moch kaj aliaj similaj estas al ni utilaj: ili defendas nin kontraŭ ilia partio mem, kiu alie serĉus ĉiun rimedon por kalumnii kaj ataki nin (de Beaufront in Zamenhof 1988, 12).

[Speak well of Moch to whoever asks you about him, ... but between us, Moch and others like him are useful to us: they defend us against their own party, which would otherwise seek every means to slander and attack us.]

Over the following months, de Beaufront's tolerance for Moch wore thin. In June 1901 letters, he plotted to gently push Moch to resign:

ni ne povas forigi lin 1-e la motivo mankas, 2-e tio ĉi estus danĝera por nia afero mem, ĉar ni riskus ke la dreyfusanoj organizu sisteman agitadon kontraŭ ni, pro la elpelo ne meritita de unu el ili. s-ro sébert kaj aliaj ne akceptos la aferon. mi tre esperas ke moch de si mem ekŝiĝos aparte kiam li vidos la nulecon praktikan de lia rolo en la klubo. mi uzos la influon... (de Beaufront in Zamenhof 1988, 25-26)

[We cannot get rid of him. First, the motive is missing. Second, that would be dangerous for our cause itself, because we would run the risk of the Dreyfusards organizing a systematic agitation against

us, due to the expulsion that one of them deserved. Mr. Sebert and others will not accept the matter. I really hope that Moch will resign by himself separately when he sees the practical nullity of his role in the club. I will use the influence...]

De Beaufront went on to manipulate Bourlet with flattery, pushing him to orchestrate Moch’s exit. On June 27, de Beaufront hinted Bourlet might gain power if he convinced Moch to resign:

vi tre bone agis por viaj proponoj al moch. ... vi trovus rimedon por elpeli dolĉe s-ron moch, pri kio mi tre facile konsolas ĉar mi tute sincere parolis, kiam mi diris al vi ke mi revas vin kiel prezidanton de l’ grupo (de Beaufront in Zamenhof 1988, 28).

[You have done very well with your proposals to Moch. ... you could find a way to sweetly expel Mr. Moch, for which I would be very easily consoled because I spoke completely sincerely when I told you that I dream of you as the group’s president.]

By the very next day, the plot shrank to a passive wish for Moch’s resignation. De Beaufront assures Bourlet, “pri moch mi pensas tute kiel vi, sed mi mem ne povas perforte lin elpeli. ... se moch ekŝiĝos de si mem mi estos tre ĝoja pro la grupo” (“I think exactly as you do about Moch, but I myself cannot force him out. ... If Moch resigns of his own accord I will be very happy for the group,” de Beaufront in Zamenhof 1988, 29). De Beaufront revived the idea in February 1904, writing to Laisant that he wanted to lead Moch to quit (de Beaufront 1904a, 24 février).

De Beaufront’s letters with Laisant prove his anti-Dreyfusard sympathy was motivated by anti-Semitism, not solely by patriotism. In a 16 June 1901 letter to Laisant, de Beaufront doubted that Aryans, whom he called “*les civilisés*” (“the civilized ones”) would accept Léon Bollack’s proposed international language. This letter reveals de Beaufront’s belief in Aryan superiority.

In 1901, de Beaufront and other anti-Dreyfusards resigned themselves to working with the Dreyfusards, determined to preserve neŭtraleco. Bourlet and de Beaufront’s 1901 correspondence indicates that Affair politics motivated their emphasis on neŭtraleco. Yet even de Beaufront’s anti-Dreyfusard allies were not safe from his schemes. De Beaufront and Bourlet began to clash in 1902, in a lengthy fight that pained Zamenhof (Boulton 1962, 86). In 1902, Bourlet discovered that de Beaufront had signed publishing contracts that essentially bound Zamenhof to Hachette for life and gave de Beaufront censorship rights on every Esperanto book (Privat

1937, 143-144). The Hachette contracts gave rise to damaging rumors that Zamenhof was reaping great profits from Esperanto—a perception that ran counter-productive to efforts to protect the movement from anti-Semitism (Boulton 1962, 94). Letters from 1903 show that de Beaufront plotted with Dreyfusard Charles Laisant to expel Bourlet from the movement (de Beaufront 1903, 11 janvier).

3 The subtext of “neŭtraleco”

The Affair is conspicuously absent from the pages of *L'Espérantiste*, *Espero Pacifista*, and *Espero Katolika*. Yet between 1904 and 1906 their pages regularly discuss the need for neutrality in language that evoked the Affair debate then dominating French public life. Authors such as Peter Forster in his *The Esperanto Movement* (1982) and Marjorie Boulton in her *Zamenhof, aŭtoro de Esperanto* (1962) have done work on *L'Espérantiste*—the first influential Esperantist publication in France, which de Beaufront edited, subsidized, and largely wrote. This research complements theirs by focusing solely on the Affair. Few researchers have analyzed *Espero Pacifista* or *Espero Katolika*—two prominent sect-specific Esperanto periodicals published in France that both discussed neŭtraleco.

The Affair was tightly intertwined with matters of war and peace. Since France's 1871 defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, many believed that France needed a war with Germany to regain its lost territory, Alsace-Lorraine. Anti-Dreyfusards generally had militarist sympathies and did not trust a movement that promoted pacifism. Alliance with the pacifist movement would have raised questions about the Esperantist view of the Army, and could have been perceived as a Dreyfusard position. De Beaufront wanted to avoid this perception.

While the Affair dominated headlines in the mainstream French press, the neŭtraleco debate did so in *L'Espérantiste*. Esperantists argued both for and against neŭtraleco. In a July 1898 essay, Belgian Esperanto promoter René Lemaire argued that Esperantists ought to ally themselves with the peace movement. He claimed the two movements shared similar goals and would enjoy a larger membership if they pooled their efforts, as those committed to pacifism would naturally support Esperanto, and vice versa (Lemaire 1898, 86-88). To demonstrate the neŭtraleco he opposed, Lemaire quoted de Beaufront's own writing:

L'Esperanto inspire de la méfiance à beaucoup de gens et des soupçons à quelques gouvernements. Nous devons punir sévèrement la manifestation de tout sentiment, l'expression publique de toute

opinion, qui pourrait faire croire que sous le prétexte d’une langue internationale, nous servons les intérêts d’un camp religieux, politique ou autre. En corps, les Espérantistes doivent rester aussi neutres que leurs intérêts sur toutes les questions qui se discutent dans le monde. (Lemaire 1898, 88)

[Esperanto inspires distrust in many people and suspicions in some governments. We must severely punish the manifestation of any sentiment, the public expression of any opinion, that could make some believe that under the pretext of an international language, we are serving the interests of a particular field, religious, political or otherwise. As a whole, the Esperantists must remain as neutral as their interests in all the questions discussed in the world.]

In *L’Espérantiste*, the neŭtraleco debate was well underway. De Beaufront reiterated in its pages the arguments he had previously made in private letters. One example is de Beaufront’s July 1904 essay, “La patriotismo kaj Esperanto” (“Patriotism and Esperanto,” de Beaufront 1904c). In French public life, the Affair was often discussed as a matter of patriotism: the Army’s supporters called Dreyfusards unpatriotic for challenging the Army at a time when many believed France to be on the brink of war with Germany. When the case against Dreyfus weakened, anti-Dreyfusards justified their position as a patriotic duty to defend the French Army. Some believed it would be better for the nation to keep an innocent man in prison rather than disgrace the Army by admitting its mistake. Dreyfusards who insisted on re-evaluating Dreyfus’s case argued that the justice system’s integrity mattered more than defending the Army purely for the sake of national unity.

De Beaufront’s essay neatly avoids taking sides, by allying itself simply with “patriotism” rather than with a particular cause. The essay’s emphasis on patriotism (a value more often invoked by anti-Dreyfusards than by Dreyfusards) hints at his sympathies. He addresses the concerns of self-proclaimed patriots, who tended to oppose exonerating Dreyfus out of a desire to support the Army, and were suspicious of a movement promoting reconciliation just as their nation seemed on the brink of war with a bitter enemy. Instead, de Beaufront argues that “la patriotismo instigas nin fariĝi Esperantistoj” (“patriotism encourages us to become Esperantists,” de Beaufront 1904c, 130). Although the patriot feels an ardent devotion to his own language, he will choose to also use Esperanto, as it honors the patriotism of all civilized peoples, he writes.

The next year in Lingvo Internacia Moch puts forth his own argument for neutrality. Recently recommended to the Central Committee of the newly proposed Esperantist League (the Tutmonda Ligo Esperantista, an unrealized project of Zamenhof's, cf. Zamenhof 1904), Moch advocates that the Committee take a "helping" role, rather than a leading one. This approach would allow the Committee both to preserve the movement's republican nature and avoid making controversial choices about its affiliations and positions. Moch constantly invokes his international pacifist organization as a model for the Esperantist movement, praising it for successfully accommodating members of many different social classes, religions, and political sympathies (Moch 1905a, 301-304), and advocating that the World Esperantist League strive to be "tute liberala organizaĵo de la movado pacista" ("a completely liberal organization of the pacifist movement," Moch 1905a, 304).

Both Dreyfusard and anti-Dreyfusard Esperantists favored neŭtraleco, as is clear from de Beaufront and Moch's essays – though each side defined it differently. Neither camp wanted to risk alienating a segment of the French public.

One option to dilute Esperanto's Jewish influence was to blend the international language movement with the peace movement. Moch became the chief proponent of this strategy and became frustrated with the way his colleagues resisted association with pacifism. Moch left the mainstream Esperanto movement and founded his own Societo Esperantista por la Paco along with his own journal, *Espero Pacifista*, in 1905 (Forster 1982, 78). Zamenhof wished him full success with this venture, as he had always intended for Esperanto to serve the cause of world peace (Zamenhof 1980, 89).

The movement's definition of neŭtraleco evolved – perhaps to de Beaufront's dismay – to allow sect-specific Esperantist groups, with their own magazines such as *Espero Socialista*, *Espero Hebrea*, *Espero Protestanta*, *Espero Framasona*. The journal *Espero Katolika* debuted in 1903 and quickly positioned itself in opposition to de Beaufront's camp. An article in the first edition redefined neŭtraleco in a way that seemed to criticize de Beaufront's editing of *L'Espérantiste*. Editor Henri Auroux, who was French, argued that neŭtraleco did not mean Esperantists could not hold controversial positions. Instead, he said neŭtraleco meant Esperantists must tolerate each other's opinions. He wrote:

Kiam ĵurnalo publikigis artikolon pri kelka ideo, tuj unu el niaj majstroj prenis severan mienon, tondris al la malfeliĉa ĵurnalisto kaj dediĉis lin al dioj inferaj, pretekste ke ĝia verkinto estis parolinta pri socialismo aŭ alia dogmaro.

Neŭtraleco povas esti komprenata dumaniere: Tiu estas neŭtrala, kiu nenion diras, kontentiĝas kanti pri birdetoj kaj floroj, pri malnovaj legendoj aŭ vojaĝaj aventuroj; ankaŭ neŭtrala tiu, kiu, dirante ĉion, kion li pensas, permesas al ceteraj diri ĉion, kion ili volas: tiele ĉi neŭtrala *Espero Katolika*. (Auroux 1903, 2)

[When a newspaper published an article about some idea, immediately one of our masters took a stern look, thundered at the unfortunate journalist and dedicated him to the gods of hell, under the pretext that the writer had spoken about socialism or some other dogma.

Neutrality can be understood in two ways: He is neutral who says nothing, is content to sing about little birds and flowers, about old legends or travel adventures; he is also neutral who, saying everything he thinks, allows the rest to say everything they want: Catholic Hope is neutral in this way.]

De Beaufront, who made his devout Catholicism well-known, never wrote an article for *Espero Katolika*.

Espero Pacifista, founded and edited by Moch, showed a greater pre-occupation with the Affair – though always in coded references with terms like “pacifism” and “patriotism.” Moch kept trying to link Esperanto and pacifism perhaps because he had not given up his old fight with de Beaufront. In the journal’s first article in July 1905, Moch argued the pacifist movement should adopt Esperanto (Moch 1905b, 3), as he also advocated before the Congrès universel de la paix (Universal Peace Congress) (Moch 1905c, 163-177).

Anxiety over neŭtraleco became acute in 1905, the year of Esperanto’s First World Congress in Boulogne-sur-Mer, France. As the Congress approached, Zamenhof feared that anti-Semitism could damage his cause (Gamba 2018, 75). The Société did not want to draw attention to Zamenhof’s Judaism (Moya Escayola 1989, 54). Zamenhof, Michaux and Boirac were trying in vain to reconcile the Société’s factions, and many French Esperantists expected the Congress to fail (Boulton 1962, 104). Meanwhile, the group was meeting without Zamenhof. Zamenhof arrived in Boulogne on August 3, 1905, not knowing that a few days prior Michaux, Bourlet, Javal and Sebert had discussed his draft speech and deemed it disastrous (Boulton 1962, 105).

Zamenhof’s August 5 speech alluded to his hope for a universal religion. He implied that the Congress transcended not only national boundaries, but religious ones as well. He declared that the Congress fueled his hope for progress toward international brotherhood and said, “sed tiel same kiel

mi en la nuna momento ne estas ia naciano, sed simpla homo, tiel same mi ankaŭ sentas, ke en tiu ĉi momento mi ne apartenas al ia nacia aŭ partia religio, sed mi estas nur homo" ("but just as I am not a citizen of any nation at this moment, but a simple person, in the same way I also feel that at this moment that I do not belong to any national or party religion, but I am just a person," Zamenhof 1929, 365). He concluded the speech with a prayer – which French Esperantists had implored him to omit – addressed to a God "kiun ĉiuj malsame prezentas, / sed ĉiuj egale en koro Vin sentas" ("whom everyone perceives differently, / but everyone feels equally in their heart", Zamenhof 1929, 365). Under their persuasion, he did agree to omit the prayer's final stanza, which would have stated, "Kristanoj, hebreoj aŭ mahometanoj / Ni ĉiuj de Di' estas filoj" ("Christians, Hebrews or Muslims / We are all children of God", Zamenhof 1929, 365). To French intellectuals, Zamenhof's proposed speech seemed "nebulous and sentimental." They feared its final words "eble incitos la kongresanojn ĝis interbatado" ("might provoke the congress members to rioting," Boulton 1962, 105). The group implored Zamenhof to remove all the emotional, mystical elements from his speech and omit the *Prayer* (Boulton 1962, 105). Zamenhof, brought to tears by the situation, refused to alter his speech except to give up the poem's final stanza (Boulton 1962, 106).

The speech ideologically allied Esperanto with a universal religion of peace. This had been Zamenhof's intention from the start, but had never been publicized in France. Now that it had been announced, the French Esperantists grew anxious. The need for an agreed-upon neutral ideology led the Paris leadership to draft a document, ostensibly written by Zamenhof but negotiated with other members. This document, the *Bulonja Deklaracio* (Boulogne Declaration) stated that the Esperanto movement was not associated with any religious or political ideology. The Declaration stated: "Ĉiu alia ideo aŭ espero, kiun tiu aŭ alia esperantisto ligas kun la esperantismo estos lia afero pure privata, por kiu la esperantismo ne respondas." ("every other idea or hope that this or that Esperantist connects with Esperantism will be his purely private matter, for which Esperantism is not responsible," Zamenhof 1929, 237). "Ĉiuj opinioj kaj verkoj de la kreinto de Esperanto havas, simile al la opinioj kaj verkoj de ĉiu alia esperantisto, karakteron absolute privatan kaj por neniu devigan." ("All the opinions and works of the creator of Esperanto have, similarly to the opinions and works of every other Esperantist, an absolutely private character and binding on no one," Zamenhof 1929, 238). The Declaration echoes de Beaufront's previous rhetoric on the issue.

The *neŭtraleco* discussion continued over the next three years. Meanwhile, the *Société* continued to fight internally and debate its principles

publicly. In December 1905, Cart, then defending de Beaufront while trying to maintain a friendship with Bourlet, feared that factions could destroy the movement (Cart 1905, 27 décembre).

Moch’s *Espero Pacifista* took a sharp, overtly political turn when it began to laud Dreyfusard politicians and criticize their foes. In its December 1905 issue, Moch published an Esperanto translation of an article by famous pacifist and Esperantist Alfred Hermann Fried criticizing former French foreign minister Théophile Delcassé, who was unpopular with Dreyfusards (Fried 1905, 252-256). Delcassé desperately wanted the Dreyfus Affair to disappear, and so persuaded a cabinet to submit the Dreyfus case to an appeals court in order to “bury” it in legal wrangling and remove it from public view (Fuller 2012, 107). In January 1906 Moch published an article that lauded two prominent Dreyfusards: he expressed approval that President Armand Fallières had been elected and praised his predecessor President Émile Loubet, who had pardoned Dreyfus (Moch 1906, pp. 33-34). All of this appeared in *Espero Pacifista* – without ever mentioning the disgraced captain.

As the campaign to exonerate Dreyfus continued, Esperanto’s neŭtraleco grew ever more important to French elites. In January 1906, a final essay from de Beaufront makes the case once more: “la toleremon, plenan, absolutan toleremon, tiel plenan, tiel absolutan, kiel nia neŭtraleco mem. Ĉar estas konsentite, ke l’Esperantismo estas malfermata por ĉiuj opinioj, por ĉiuj partioj, por ĉiuj religioj.” (“Tolerance, full, absolute tolerance, as full, as absolute, as our neutrality itself. Because it is agreed that Esperantism is open to all opinions, to all parties, to all religions,” de Beaufront 1906b, 3). He repeats the same arguments that he and others had advanced in preceding years, though in stronger language. “tial ke ni estas Esperantistoj, ni havu por la religio kaj la politiko de la aliaj la tutan respekton kaj la tutan toleremon, kiujn ni deziras por la niaj. Alie nur mensogo estus nia neŭtraleco” (“therefore, since we are Esperantists, we should have all the respect for the religion and politics of others that we wish for our own. Otherwise our neutrality would be merely a lie,” de Beaufront 1906b, 3). De Beaufront’s insistence reveals his desperation, as he grew aware that he was losing the neŭtraleco battle.

4 The “ideo” returns

The Dreyfusards’ final victory came. The captain was formally exonerated by a military commission in July 1906 (Bredin 1983, 603). The Société kept working actively to preserve Esperanto’s neŭtraleco on questions of politics and religion. At Sebert’s instigation, leadership of the Second World

Congress of Esperanto, in 1906, in Geneva announced a strict *Deklaracio pri la neŭtraleco de Esperanto-kongresoj* (Declaration on the neutrality of Esperanto congresses) that forbade Congress attendees from discussing any political, religious, or social issues (Forster 1982, 98). Zamenhof had already been invited to give the opening address at the 1906 Universal Congress in Geneva on the condition that he not mention his philosophical and political ideas (Garvía 2015, 89). Zamenhof spoke on August 28, just a few weeks after Captain Dreyfus' exoneration and only two months after a vicious pogrom in Białystok, his birthplace, had killed over 200 Jews (Schor 2016, 92). In his speech, he mentioned this pogrom and reintroduced his "inner idea" publicly. He insisted that this idea was not too naive, and even that it was more important than Esperanto's role as a practical tool. He also criticized people who considered Esperanto only a language:

Bedaŭrinde en la lasta tempo inter la esperantistoj aperis tiaj voĉoj, kiuj diras, "Esperanto estas nur lingvo; evitu ligi eĉ tute private la esperantismon kun ia ideo, ĉar alie oni pensos, ke ni ĉiuj havas tiun ideon, kaj ni malplaĉos al diversaj personoj, kiuj ne amas tiun ideon!" Ho, kiaj vortoj! El la timo, ke ni eble ne plaĉos al tiuj personoj, kiuj mem volas uzi Esperanton nur por aferoj praktikaj por ili, ni devas ĉiuj elŝiri el nia koro tiun parton de la esperantismo, kiu estas la plej grava, la plej sankta, tiun ideon, kiu estis la ĉefa celo de la afero de Esperanto, kiu estis la stelo, kiu ĉiam gvidadis ĉiujn batalantojn por Esperanto! Ho, ne, ne, neniam! Kun energia protesto ni forĵetas tiun ĉi postulon... Kial do aliĝis al ni la personoj, kiuj vidas en Esperanto "nur lingvon"? (Zamenhof 1929, 371–372)

[Unfortunately, recently there have been voices among Esperantists who say: "Esperanto is just a language; avoid connecting Esperantism with any idea, even in private, otherwise people will think that we all have that idea, and we will displease various people who do not love that idea!" Oh, what words! Out of fear that we might not please those who themselves want to use Esperanto only for practical things for them, we must all tear from our hearts that part of Esperantism which is the most important, the most sacred, that idea, which was the main goal of the cause of Esperanto, which was the star that always guided all the fighters for Esperanto! Oh, no, no, never! With an energetic protest we reject this demand... So why did the people who see Esperanto as "just a language" join us?]

Esther Schor wisely wrote that this speech seemed to critique de Beaufront (Schor 2016, 93). That same year, Zamenhof's *Dogmoj de Hilelismo* was finally

published in France— anonymously, however, to avoid association with Esperanto.

In *L'Espérantiste* that October, de Beaufront repudiated the inner idea of Esperanto altogether, writing, “mi ne povus tro ripeti, por evitigi danĝerajn trograndigojn, kiuj sin turnus kontraŭ ni, Esperanto estas kaj povas esti nur lingvo; en si kaj per si mem ĝi enkorpiĝas nenian ideon specialan” (“I could not repeat too much, to avoid dangerous exaggerations that could turn against us, that Esperanto is and can only be a language; in and of itself it embodies no special idea,” de Beaufront 1906a, 195). De Beaufront continued to insist on neŭtraleco, despite Zamenhof’s dramatic return to idealism. After great efforts to keep Esperanto neutral, de Beaufront and other French Esperantists were resistant to Zamenhof’s abrupt decision to all but explicitly embrace a pacifist ideology and a universal religion.

When Zamenhof spoke at the Third World Congress in Cambridge on August 12, 1907, his rhetoric returned sharply to the *ideo*, his original vision for the language (Privat 1927, 49). Zamenhof seems to have taken the closing of Dreyfus’ case as a signal that it was now safe to roam into ideological territory. He departed from the rigid neŭtraleco that de Beaufront and others had promoted for years and declared his goal that the movement would lead to mutual understanding and peace. He preached “gravan ideon de intergenta justeco kaj frateco, kaj al tiu ĉi ideo volas servi la noblaj homoj de ĉiuj popoloj, tute egale, ĉu iliaj popoloj estas fortaj aŭ malfortaj” (“an important idea of inter-ethnic justice and brotherhood, and the noble people of all nations want to serve this idea, regardless of whether their nations are strong or weak,” Zamenhof 1929, 375). One year after the Army had finally cleared Dreyfus’ name, Zamenhof returned to his idealistic hope that a language could unite mankind.

Zamenhof’s Cambridge address went further by making the *ideo* more ambitious than ever before. Zamenhof invoked the idea of Esperantism as a second nationality for the first time, referring to “Esperantujo” (“Esperantoland”), the worldwide community of Esperantists (Zamenhof 1929, 378). He compared the World Congresses to meetings where the ancient Hebrews reinvigorated their faith (Zamenhof 1929, 377), thereby introducing the idea of religious devotion to Esperanto. Zamenhof’s speech at the Cambridge Congress was his most idealistic yet and came as close as it could— within the limits set by the *Bulonja Deklaracio*— to declaring Esperanto the language of pacifism and Hilelismo. He ended the speech crying, “vivu la celo kaj la interna ideo de la esperantismo, vivu la frateco de la popoloj, vivu ĉio, kio rompas la murojn inter la gentoj, vivu, kresku kaj floru la verda standardo!” (“Long live the goal and the inner idea of Esperantism, long live the brotherhood of the peoples, long live everything

that breaks the walls between the nations, long live, grow and flourish the green banner!”, Zamenhof 1929, 381).

Zamenhof prefaced his speech with the disclaimer that it reflected only his personal opinion. Despite this, it had a strong effect on the Société’s leaders. This speech, and the natural surprise it must have provoked in many French Esperantists, may offer some explanation for the events that followed.

A few months later, frustrated Société members struck back. In October 1907, at the *Délégation pour l’adoption d’une langue auxiliaire internationale* in Paris, an anonymous delegate introduced Ido, an offshoot language famously described as a “purified Esperanto” (Jespersen 1909, 677). The *Délégation* included three Société leaders, and all three – de Beaufront, as well as Dreyfusards Leau and Couturat – betrayed Esperanto and defected to Ido (Boulton 1962, 165). Ido veered away from Esperanto’s interethnic matrix of words to adopt primarily French word endings, amounting to a kind of “Frenchification” of Esperanto, which positioned the language as an emulation of the Romance languages and aligned it with the French neoclassical tradition (Schor 2016, 117). Suspicion fell over de Beaufront, whom Zamenhof had appointed to represent Esperanto. De Beaufront initially denied responsibility – then six months later took credit for it. Until the 1930s, de Beaufront’s self-unmasking was widely believed (Drezen 1931, 185). Since then historians such as Ric Berger (1937) doubt de Beaufront’s confession and suspect Couturat as Ido’s true author (Gordin 2015, 147). Couturat began to publish Ido as a new language (Privat 1937, 140).

Both Dreyfusards and anti-Dreyfusards collaborated on this scheme. Couturat had been in touch with Moch, who wanted a reformed language, about his plan. Sebert knew it was coming as well (Boulton 1962, 162). Zamenhof considered it a betrayal by friends and afterward urged others, including Lemaire, to detach themselves from the *Délégation* (Lemaire 1908, 19 mars).

The Ido schism was a major scandal in its day (Boulton 1962, 158). Yet Esperanto had already grown strong enough to withstand it (Tonkin 1987, 74). The ranks of Esperantists kept growing steadily (Centassi 1995, 305). It has been estimated that roughly 20% of Esperanto’s leadership adopted Ido – while only three to four percent of rank-and-file members did (Jordan 1987, 43). The Esperanto movement was in two. Zamenhof suffered, then broke from the movement in order to seize back the liberty to voice his own opinions. In 1912 Zamenhof repudiated any official position in Esperanto affairs and put his name to his religion (Privat 1937, 113). His *interna ideo* has had a long-lasting impact on the Esperanto movement, as some Esperanto groups have continued to understand it as their purpose (Janton 1993, 34).

Scholars including De Kloe believe that Couturat was Ido’s true author, and that de Beaufront’s confession was simply a cover. They consider Couturat’s role as arbitrator at 1907 meetings in Paris to select an international language a ruse so he could select Ido (De Kloe 2013, 113). Ergo Ido was founded by allies from across the aisle: Dreyfusard Couturat and anti-Dreyfusard de Beaufront. Both were motivated by the Affair’s divisive political climate, and by a fierce desire to keep Esperanto out of it.

5 Concluding remarks

The French Esperantist movement never acknowledged the Dreyfus Affair, even as the language’s period of rapid growth in France coincided with the highly publicized national campaign to release and exonerate the Jewish captain. Prominent French Esperantists’ public discussion of neŭtraleco, in coded language, indicates the silence was not by unanimous choice. Furthermore, private correspondence reveals their factional split on the case. Emboldened by Dreyfus’s exoneration, Zamenhof abruptly departed from the neŭtraleco policy, in a daring attempt to steer the movement back toward his own values. De Beaufront, frustrated by the sudden destruction of the neŭtraleco he had protected for years, turned his efforts toward subverting Zamenhof’s control.

The documents cited in this paper reveal the factional divide and power struggle that motivated the infamous 1907 betrayal. Ido’s two authors were both motivated by a desire to maintain neŭtraleco on the Dreyfus affair, though they held opposite positions on it. De Beaufront, an anti-Semite and anti-Dreyfusard, collaborated with Dreyfusards Leau and Couturat for the sake of a politically neutral international language.

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La subteksto de neŭtraleco: La Dreyfus-afero kaj la Esperanto-movado

Resumo: Ĉirkaŭ 1900 la Esperanto-movado estis centrata en Francio, lando polarigita de la Afero Dreyfus. La publikaj dokumentoj de la movado neniam mencias la Aferon. Ĝiaj gvidantoj parolis pri la bezono konservi la neŭtralecon de Esperanto pri politiko kaj religio uzante lingvon, kiu portis subtekston de la Afero. Privata korespondado inter elstaraj esperantistoj malkaŝas ilian frakcian disiĝon pri la Afero kaj ilian deziron konservi la larĝan allogon de la lingvo en polarigita Francio. Ilia publika diskuto pri neŭtraleco, en kodita lingvo, indikas ke ili silentis pri la Afero ne pro unuanima elekto. La dokumentoj cititaj en ĉi tiu artikolo rivelas la frakcian disiĝon kaj potencrivalecon, kiuj motivis la Ido-skismon en 1907. Ĉi tiu esplorado temigas elitaj francaj esperantistoj kaj kompletigas laboron de historiistoj, kiuj koncentriĝis pri la pensado de Zamenhof. Ĝi inkluzivas esplorojn pri *Espero Pacifista* kaj *Espero Katolika*, kiujn malmultaj studis. Ĉi tiu esploro kompletigas alian laboron pri *L'Espérantiste* per fokuso pri la Afero.

Ŝlosilvortoj: Esperanto; Dreyfus-afero; Zamenhof; de Beaufront; Antisemitism.

Le sous-texte de “neŭtraleco” : L’affaire Dreyfus et le mouvement espérantiste

Résumé : Vers 1900, le mouvement espérantiste était centré sur la France polarisée par l’affaire Dreyfus. Les documents publics ne mentionnent jamais l’affaire. Ses dirigeants parlaient de la nécessité de maintenir la neutralité politique et religieuse avec des mots qui portaient un sous-texte de l’affaire. La correspondance privée entre éminents espérantistes révèle la division regardant l’affaire et le désir de maintenir un grand attrait pour l’espéranto en France. Leur débat public de neutralité, en langage codé, indique que leur silence regardant l’affaire n’est pas arrivé par un choix unanime. Les documents cités dans cet article révèlent la fracture et la lutte de pouvoir qui motivaient le schisme provoqué par l’ido en 1907. Cette recherche s’intéresse aux Espérantistes français d’élite et complémente travaux par historiens qui s’intéressent à la pensée de Zamenhof. Elle contient de la recherche regardant *Espero Pacifista* or *Espero Katolika*, ceux que peu ont analysés. Cette recherche complémente d’autres travaux regardant *L'Espérantiste* en se concentrant sur l’affaire.

Mots-clés : Esperanto ; L’affaire Dreyfus ; Zamenhof ; de Beaufront ; Antisemitisme.