CONSTRAINTS ON THE ART AND CRAFT OF CONSTRUCTING LANGUAGES
Lessons Learnt from Classic Interlinguistics

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ABSTRACT • In the 21st century, constructed languages started to be normalized as an object of scientific study. Their construction has become increasingly popular thanks to the spread of the internet and, therefore, the availability of linguistic resources from the most 'exotic' human languages. The practice of constructing languages (in brief, conlanging) is often made by non-professional linguists with much enthusiasm and anecdotal experience but without a solid linguistic ground. Interlinguistics may be divided into four periods (preclassic, classic, modern, postmodern), where conlanging is the postmodern part. From its history, contemporary conlangers can profit from the errors and successes of their predecessors of classic Interlinguistics. This period started with the publication of Volapük (1879) until the release by IALA of Interlingua (1951). Its protagonists were mainly involved in the quest for the optimal International Auxiliary Language (IAL); nonetheless, their lessons are still valid.

KEYWORDS • Interlinguistics; Constructed languages; Conlanging; Language construction.

> *Si tratta, nei suoi tentativi più ambiziosi, di invenzione di nuovi segni linguistici.**
> Alessandro Bausani, *Le lingue inventate*

1. What are constructed languages?

This paper aims to fill a gap in the literature on constructed languages, namely showing the constraints in the freedom of constructing language projects for optimal international communication. Linguists and amateurs mainly proposed such language projects during the classic period of Interlinguistics, i.e., 1879–1951, when the topic of international communication was vividly debated in public. In that period, the final goal for constructing languages was the adoption of an 'International Auxiliary Language' (along with the terminology then in vogue; in brief, IAL) mainly for diplomacy, science, commerce, and tourism (as in the introduction by Kerckshoff 1880); here, 'auxiliary' should be understood as non-national and therefore 'neutral' – see below for a critical analysis of this key feature.

The wording 'constructed languages' was introduced in the public debate by Otto Jespersen at the Second International Congress of Linguistics, in 1931. Then, he launched an appeal to

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* It is the matter, in its most ambitious struggles, of the invention of new language signs.

linguists from all over the world to work jointly pursuing the common goal of establishing a norm for an optimized international language, based on the projects that already proved to function then, in particular Esperanto and Ido, so to solve the problem of international communication. Before WW2, English was rising but it still had at least German and French as competitors in the arena of international communication: the lack of a clear, rational choice, argued the linguists of the time, was the main problem in international relations, as the official adoption of any national language – not only English – would have given an unfair advantage to the native speakers of that language. This is the reason why it was worth the effort to develop a rationalized grammar, argued Jespersen and all the others involved in the project. The rationale behind the optimization of the IALs was finding an equilibrium between two opposite forces: the internal *regularization* of the grammar (for speeding up the production in the IAL, ideally there should be no exceptions) and its external *transparency* (for language reception, which strongly depends on the repertoire of the receiver of the IAL; for a historical account by an IAL proponent, see de Wahl 1928).

The branch of language science devoted to such an endeavour is Interlinguistics. Most researchers consider Interlinguistics the initial form of what later developed into 'language policy and planning,' or sometimes 'language management,' especially at the national or regional levels (for its continuing influence, see Gobbo, forthcoming). The relative success of Esperanto in sociolinguistic terms, being able for having gathered around it a community of practice already in the belle époque, in particular, in the francophone areas in Europe, positioned all other projects proposed for international communication to be framed as 'rivals' of Esperanto, as the analysis of Garvía (2015) robustly shows. For this reason, the case study of Esperanto will come back many times in this paper.

Until the last two decades, most scholars in the field of Interlinguistics considered its purpose for international communication the main criterion to consider a constructed language worth of analysis. In other words, any language constructed for different purposes had to be put outside the scope of the discipline. Detlev Blanke, perhaps the most influential scholar devoted to Interlinguistics of the second half of the past century, still in 2004 reiterated Jespersen's foundation of the discipline. On the same line we should collocate Sabine Fiedler, who took the lead of the German school in Interlinguistics after Blanke's tragic passing, who still in 2019 argues that the only real 'planned languages' are Esperanto and its rivals, while any language project constructed for fantasy and science fiction book, graphic novel, or film, has just 'some points of contact' with planned languages, but, essentially, they are a different object of study, and they should be treated as a world apart. In this way, it is difficult to argue that their language construction is similar in both cases.

In this paper, I argue for the opposite, following the intuition of Bausani (1970/1974). According to him, the core feature of constructed languages is their process of invention, regardless of the inventor's ideas regarding language use. In fact, a language project proposed for a 'serious' use may end to become a literary tool because the target group eventually does not adopt it in serious contexts. For example, this is the case of Láadan, conceived at first as the secret language for supporting feminists in their goal of transforming society as a whole; ultimately, it became the primary tool for societal transformation in the utopic science-fiction novel *Native Tongue*, authored by its language proponent, Suzette Haden Elgin (1985; see also Menzies 2012). The case study of Láadan shows that every constructed language is invented with a purpose in mind; however, it may not answer the needs of the community, which actually makes some use of the language. Another, more recent, case study is Toki Pona, a language with a restricted vocabulary ('137 essential words', Lang 2021). Developed for philosophical reflection and well-being by Sonja Lang, it explicitly states not to rival Esperanto. However, there is a derivative project, initially baptized Toki Ma and now renamed Kokanu, which was developed to acts as an IAL. Kokanu has

approximately 380 words 'compared to Esperanto's thousands, and a much simpler and more flexible grammar' (Kokanu 2025), an argument that echoes the debates of the early decades of the 20th century. The vitality of Kokanu, if any, is unclear. The case studies of Láadan and Toki Pona/Kokanu show that it is important not to limit the scope of analysis to the purpose of international communication only: language construction can be done for artistic or literary use, and there is neither shame nor any essential difference in inventing a language for self-expression compared to one constructed for international communication. Moreover, a language invented for communication can be eventually used for art, or vice versa (the latter case is very rare).

2. Language projects and their sociolinguistic success

What does really the language proponent develop? The develop of constructed languages has as its first result not a language, strictly speaking, but only its structure: in other words, the construction output is the language *project*. Living languages are such because there is a community of users actively using them, wherever they are constructed or not. The focus of this paper is on the construction process– which is both an art and a craft – of the language project *before* its adoption by a community of users, if any. In fact, there are thousands of language projects proposed in history, but a dozen or so succeeded in gathering a community of users around them, most notably Esperanto, which we can call a sociolinguistic success. The first lesson for the contemporary 'conlanger' (meaning: language project designer) is that any language, including constructed ones, produces its own original culture, if used systematically and for a long time. Esperanto is a proof of that; it is worth noting, that such a process is unique. In other words, no other constructed language has achieved such a remarkable result, and it is very doubtful that it will.

This aspect has been explored in detail. In comparing the sociolinguistic scales of language vitality by Fishman (GIDS), Lewis and Simons (EGIDS), tailored for minority languages, and Blanke (1989, 2006) for IALs, Gobbo (2021) calls 'awakening languages'[1] the projects which shows 'tiny support (<1000 users) from a bunch of isolated activists' (Gobbo 2021:8) mainly in contact via online means. Besides historical rivals of Esperanto such as Ido, Occidental/Interlingue and IALA's Interlingua, we can safely enlist in this exclusive club of awakening constructed languages only Klingon[2]. At the same time, the popularity Dothraki and High Valyrian seems to be linked to the popularity of their diegetic universe of Games of Thrones – we lack precise data, we need further inquiries to assess their status. Without any doubt, the process of construction has its relevance in the sociolinguistic success of the proposed project; in fact, any adoption – after the language inventor – is a matter of choice. This means that the acquisition of a constructed language is always explicit: the would-be adopters should study the prescriptive grammar of the

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[1] An anonymous reviewer pointed out a possible parallelism with 're-awakening languages', a term used in the process of revitalisation of indigenous languages, for example in Australia (Hobson et al. 2010). The author wishes to th thank the anonymous reviewer for such an apt parallelism.

[2] An anonymous reviewer asked why Tolkien's most relevant invented languages, Quenya and Sindarin, are not enlisted. This is a consequence of the privacy policy Tolkien wanted for his invented languages: "Tolkien put quite a lot of information concerning his languages into the story and its appendices and index, but it is scattered about and must be gathered up and correlated to make full use of it.", in the words of Hostetter 2007:2.

language and, ultimately, accept it as it is.[3] However, the dynamics that lead to sociolinguistic success or failure differ from the process of language construction; therefore, these sociolinguistic aspects are at the margins of this paper.

In the crafting of the language project, the optimization between internal regularization (in particular, how consistent are the rules for word formation, without introducing exceptions, from a prescriptive perspective) and external transparency in the grammar (where a specific rule comes from, being the source another invented language or a natural one) is a delicate equilibrium which informs the construction principles and rules of the constructed language. In the end, they are crucially important, even for languages constructed without any aim for explicit publication of their grammars, as many languages invented for the purpose of art are. In fact, the language inventor should write a prescriptive grammar (at least for their private, secret use) and provide a dictionary, whatever the purpose of the language project is. The process of building up the vocabulary can be time-consuming; the more users are independent from the approval of the correctness of a neologism, the more the original inventor is liberal. Crucially, there is no space for negotiation between the would-be-adopter and the original language inventor: after the publication of the project the language structure is stable. Even if a fundamental defect is found, most probably, the language inventor will oppose the change and finally won't include the change in the language; instead, a new language project, often called a 'reform', an 'improvement', or 'ido' (offspring[4]) of the original one, will come out.

Garvía 2015 illustrates well the case of Volapük. Its proponent, Johann Martin Schleyer, a traditional Catholic priest from Bavaria, claimed that his language project was directly inspired by God, and, on this argument, he considered Volapük for the sake of sacred use only (Pink 2025). In particular, Schleyer refused any attempt to adapt the language structure to mundane needs like international commerce, as Kerckhoffs, a key figure in the spread of the language by the end of the 19th century, proposed[5]. So, the second lesson learnt for the contemporary 'conlanger', coming from the Volapük case study, is the following: after the language is published, it is not possible to touch its structure for free, and the risk is to divide the awakening community of practice into opposing parties, which can eventually bring the language to be abandoned.[6]

On the other hand, pretending that the language project is always prone to change in its core leads to instability. The idea is that the language should respect different sensibilities in time and

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[3] In this respect, Esperanto offers an interesting exception with *denaskuloj*, i.e., Esperanto family speakers who acquire the language in natural settings (see at least Fiedler 2012, Lindstedt 2006, Corsetti 1996). Such a phenomenon shows interesting similarities with the CODAs for sign languages (Gobbo et al. 2022).

[4] The term is used as a legacy of the debate between supporters of Esperanto and Ido when the latter came out, having some attention as a language for science for a few years (Gordin 2015). Besides the terms 'Esperantido' and 'Volapukido' to indicate derivative projects from respectively Esperanto and Volapük, Kokanu is listed as a 'Tokiponido' (Sona Pona 2025). The existence of Tokiponidos raise debate among the Toki Pona community nowadays analogously to the debates of the 20th century (see at least Lang 2024).

[5] Kerckhoffs (1888) presents the language as an 'international commercial', and proposed some changes to facilitate its acquisition. For example, a proposal was the introduction of two prepositions, identical to Esperanto, as alternative to the morphological cases of genitive and dative. For instance Schleyer's 'doma' can be replaced by 'de dom', 'of the house', and 'dome' by 'al dom' (p. 6). Schleyer's reaction fleshed out in year 1900, attacking the reforms of being a 'botched language of Pseudo-Esperanto'.

[6] It is quite ironic that the division between supporters of Schleyer and of Kerckshoff eventually replicates the format of the *Kulturkampf*, the conflict inside the Catholic community in Germany at the time, divided between loyalty to the Pope and Bismark, the founder of the Second Reich (Garvía 2015).

space, or it should comply with the positivistic view that any change, because it is new, is by definition an improvement. This is the case of the early days of Ido: Gordin 2015 convincingly shows that the Ido Movement was forced in 1911 to declare ten years of stability so "to avoid the 'flood' and the interminable discussion of the same questions" (Couturat quoted in pp. 156-157). If we scrutinize the texts produced in Ido at the time, the vast majority were metalinguistic reflections on Ido itself, without any value outside the language project.

It is unavoidable that a community of practice devotes part of its time and energies to the analysis of the language project, and it should also be added that this struggle works for self-reflection too on which kind of community form the language activists and what is their common goal. On the other hand, this aspect should not be overwhelming. In other words, some concrete action beyond the linguistic discussion should be visible, so that the language project becomes useful, at least for some people, in some contexts, beyond the pure language activism. After all, all humans want to leave a trace of their passage on Earth, and both proponents and supporters of constructed languages are no exception. This is what Ido lacked: the founders like Couturat and Jespersen opposed any literary use of the language, and this eventually failed to attract a mass of activists large enough to sustain a consistent community. The case study of Ido gives a third lesson to the contemporary conlanger: the role of intellectuals is important in the diffusion of the language, but it is not enough.

3. The craft of language construction is not completely free

The word 'invention' etymologically comes from the Latin *inventio*, meaning the moment in which the arguer looks for the arguments before performing them live, according to Cicero and the tradition of rhetorics (Wagemans 2019). Thus, it is a process of discovery, not of creation *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. Therefore, there are some theoretical limitations in the process of invention of the language project, that eventually result in concrete constraints in the freedom of the whole language construction process.

The first limitation should be identified in the investor's linguistic knowledge. As an example, consider tonemes as a fundamental unit of phonology in some languages, such as Chinese. If the inventor has no familiarity with tonemes, constructing a language project including tonemes is simply impossible. Therefore, the analysis of the construction process behind published language projects – whatever for, and in particular if there is any intention to propose a new language project – should start from the language biography of the inventor, including its language-learning history, language repertoire (with attention apart to 'mother tongues', intended as a loaded construction, in terms of linguistic ideology, see Bonfiglio 2013, 2010) and especially its level of metalinguistic awareness, which is essential in the process of language project construction.

In fact, scholarly literature shows that metalinguistic awareness is a key factor in L2 acquisition, both in natural and instructional contexts, both with children and adults (Roehr-Brackin 2018); we can regard to language construction as a conscious, supervised, process of L2 production. Thus, most observations made for L2 acquisitions may still be valid in the process language construction. Plurilingualism, intended as the ability of an individual to master more than one human language, fosters the comparison of the languages in the repertoire, reflecting over their structures, at all levels – phonological, morphological, syntactic, and pragmatic. Without any known exception, all language inventors are plurilingual. From a psychological point of view, they share – often explicitly – a feeling that their repertoire is insufficient to fulfil their needs, and this realization generates a desire for language construction, especially if driven by the construction of the diegesis, as in the exemplar case of Klingon. Bausani (1974, 1970) argues for a sense of frustrations: language inventors are plurilingual individuals well aware of the fact that, even after

acquiring all languages existing in the world – which is impossible – such feeling of insufficiency in their repertoire will never go away, and therefore they consider the opportunity of constructing a language of their own. In sum, plurilingualism is the baseline for invention, but the key factor is the metalinguistic awareness which determines the space of possibilities in the construction process: the higher the level of metalinguistic awareness, the higher the freedom level in language construction.

Another fundamental limitation in the language invention process is that, once put in use, the language inventor loses the freedom of invention. This limitation was already clear in the early days of Linguistics as a modern discipline: Ferdinand De Saussure explained it already in 1916, while referring to 'inexorable law' of mutability in languages, included constructed ones (1959: 76):

> Mutability is so inescapable that it even holds true for artificial languages. Whoever creates a language controls it only as long as it is not in circulation; from the moment when it fulfills its mission and becomes the property of everyone, control is lost. Take Esperanto as an example; if it succeeds, will it escape the inexorable law? Once launched, it is quite likely that Esperanto will enter upon a fully semiological life; it will be transmitted according to laws which have nothing in common with those of its logical creation, and there will be no turning backwards.

Finally, there is a biological limitation in the freedom of constructing a language project: it is the same limitation shared by all *human* languages. In other words, even constructed languages should respect the 'boundaries of Babel' (Moro 2015), that is the space of grammar variation admitted by our biological foundation as human species. For the sake of fiction, the language can be 'alien', meaning that it may be assigned to non-human species: an obvious example is Klingon, an 'alien race' of the Star Trek universe with a language designed with the same name (originally presented in Okrand 1992; for a reflection Okrand et al. 2011). However, Klingons in the show are played by human actors, who actually utter phrases in Klingon; thus, the language is human, after all. Moreover, in the diegesis, there are cases in which humans belonging to the Federation (an interplanetary government with a space force called the Starfleet) speak Klingon as an L2. In contrast, if we consider the Heptapod languages in the science-fiction film *Arrival* (2016), they cannot be reproduced by any physical human apparatus – as humans are not heptapods – and thus the Hetpapod languages are alien-alien, unlike Klingon, which is alien-human (see also Beinhoff 2015). Jessica Coon is the linguist consulted by the film production to help with the Heptapod languages, and she describes her experience with these words:

> While some people are disappointed to learn that I did not create the language for *Arrival*, often they are even unhappier to learn that it is not really a language at all. Instead, the symbols in the movie are based on the beautiful paintings of Montreal-based artist Martine Bertrand. While the filmmakers went to great lengths to achieve consistency across different scenes, and even created a small manual of roughly one hundred symbols used in different parts of the film, one cannot learn Heptapod B the way one can learn Klingon or Na'vi. (Coon 2020: 41)

To sum up, we can identify four factors that together define the contours of the space of freedom where the language inventor is free to move in constructing the language: first, the language repertoire; second, the level of metalinguistic awareness; third, the consideration of the 'inexorable law' (Ferdinand De Saussure, quoted above) of mutability in languages; finally, linguistic invention is always within the 'boundaries of Babel' (Andrea Moro, 2015), otherwise we are not anymore in the realm of linguistics. This remark does not imply that non-human languages like Heptapod ones are not interesting per se; the point is that they are semiotic systems that cannot make use of our linguistic knowledge for their invention process.

4. Eurocentrism and Exoticism in Interlinguistics

The reflection over Interlinguistics as a discipline started in the summer of year 1900, when Louis Couturat – a prominent French philosopher, mathematician of the belle époque – launched his appeal to the intellectuals of the time to design the optimized world language for science and diplomacy (De Kloe 2016, Krajewski 2016). His argument was that the quest for the optimal IAL was already one of Leibniz's dreams (Couturat 1900) which passed through the development of the Scientific Revolution: what the pioneers of the new science could only dream of, the contemporary scientists could realise in truth. Couturat himself learned and used Esperanto, which was already gathering a community of practice thanks to the struggles by the original Esperanto Movement founder Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof and its pioneers, especially in the Tsarist Russia, and in the francophone cities Geneva and Paris (see the classic work by Foster 1985). Thus, while the Esperanto Movement was preparing its 'foundational myth' (Gobbo 2023) that would become reality with the first World Esperanto Congress in Boulogne-sur-Mer in 1905, Couturat and his colleagues were preparing what would become the standard narrative of Interlinguistics: there was a first period, characterized by 'a priori languages', done mainly by philosophers like John Wilkins and Leibniz, that can be considered the preclassic period of the discipline. The publication of Volapük first, in 1879, and of Esperanto later, in 1887, initiated the second period of Interlinguistics, when dreams become reality. Couturat argued that the definitive IAL should be a 'a posteriori' after the proof, given by Volapük and Esperanto, that IALs can work. The definitive success would have been reached through the general adoption of one IAL only, thanks to its intrinsic qualities.

Under a purely positivistic perspective, the emphasis in the classic period of Interlinguistics (1789-1951) was put in comparing language projects: still in 1947, Manders could publish a doctoral dissertation at the University of Utrecht presenting the structure of five IALs, divided in 'phonetics and orthography, vocabulary and grammar', according to the presentation made by the author himself in 1946 – in order of publication: Volapük, Esperanto, Ido, Occidental, Novial.

Occidental, based on English and French, came out only in 1922, after the failed attempt to make Esperanto a working language at the League of Nations in 1920-1921, despite a report in its favour (Carlevaro 2019, Harry 1989). Its proponent, Edgard De Wahl, passed through the history of classic Interlinguistics, as he was an early adopter of Volapük and Esperanto as well (Mäeorg and Rahi-Tamm 2016). In 1914, after the sudden death of Couturat, just before WW1 (well described by Gordin 2015), the support around Ido entered a crisis that lasted long after the end of the Great War. Thus, there was space for a new project already in 1914, but De Wahl waited long to attract the intellectual part of the devotees to the idea of an IAL to his side: in 1922, Occidental did not succeed to reach the wide acceptance his proponent hoped. The journal he redacted, *Kosmoglott*, initially hosted different projects so to show plurality of views, without any substantial result; however, after the launch of his IAL, it accepted only articles in Occidental and eventually, in 1937, changed its name in *Cosmoglotta*, moving from Reval (Estonia) to Vienna (Kuznecov 2019). It was too late. The fourth lesson learnt is the following: proponents do not hesitate too much before publishing your language project, even if not perfect, because the seldom said truth is that the world does not wait for your constructed language forever.

Also, the reflection over Novial gives us a fifth lesson learnt for the contemporary 'conlanger'. Novial was an attempt to please all the communities of supporters, taking materials from the previous IALs (Esperanto, Ido, and Occidental), to please everybody, but eventually it pleased nobody. In other words, any constructed language, no matter its purpose, should have a distinct character of its own.

Comparisons like Manders' are still valuable to the contemporary 'conlanger', if we take

into account a cultural factor that permits not to fall into the trap of presentism: most if not all language projects proposed in the classic period of Interlinguistics were Eurocentric, without shame, as the assumption of the time was that the definitive IAL could only be Eurocentric because of world history (for a definition of Eurocentrism and its drawbacks, see Samassékou 2012). The consequence is that, under a perspective of linguistic typology, major IALs proposed after Volapük are part of the Standard Average European (SAE) linguistic area, almost without exception.[7] In the case of IALA's Interlingua, the concept of SAE was taken into account even explicitly – for instance, see its presentation by Alexander Gode, the main architect of the language project, in 1953. Carlevaro (2019, 1987) traces the language invention's process. After the report by the League of Nations in favour of the idea of an IAL in general and the acknowledgment of the success of Esperanto, being a 'living language', taught in primary and secondary schools not only for the sake of the language but also to improve the learning process of other languages, as Esperanto is 'grammar incarnate' (League of Nations 1922), the Esperantist Alice Vanderbilt Morris, together with her husband, both being billionaires, founded IALA in 1924. Its purpose was to support scientific research around IALs with funding from her patron. In 1937 the 'Advisory Board for Linguistic Research', under the guidance of Albert Debrunner (for his biography, Bloch 1958), published a report, entitled 'Some Criteria for an International Language, and Commentary'. Then, because of the upcoming war, in 1939 IALA left Europe and its headquarters found place in New York. It is important to know that the some of the 11 criteria recommended in that report were not respected in the final product of IALA, i.e., the publication of Interlingua. The General Report published in 1945 included three projects for the future IAL, developed under the principle of 'immediate readability', and in 1947 IALA sent 3,000 envelops to people who had to vote for one of the four variants (P, M, C, K) of the language project just reading a text without any previous study. Envelops reached the US, UK, France, Denmark, Czechoslovakia, and Chile. Ultimately, only 264 persons participated the survey, and their results were by the end just recommendations, as it was Alexander Gode who had the final word on any aspect of the final stage (1948-1951) of the development of Interlingua, which Gode presented to the public in year 1953.

The history of the publication of Interlingua gives the sixth lesson learnt for the contemporary 'conlanger': even if there were committees and votes so to develop the language project in a sort of democratic way, by the end, committees do not matter, and the final form is decided by one person and one person only. Stenström (2008) offers an account of the first 50 years of history of IALA's Interlingua, from the point of view of an activist pro Interlingua. One thing that strikes the reader is that Interlingua pretends to be a 'quasi-natural language', in the sense that in its language ideology their activists pretend that it is not constructed but just extracted by the history of 'Western civilization', in so doing confirm the Eurocentric bias of classic IALs more than ever.[8]

After the tragedy of WW2, when the 'Auxiliary Language Movement' (Andrew Large 1987) was almost exterminated, only the Esperanto Movement (as described already by Foster 1985) succeeded in surviving. This is the period of modern Interlinguistics. Eventually, Esperanto could

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[7] Interestingly enough, compared with its 'rivals' (as Garvía 2015 put it), Esperanto is the *least* Eurocentric IAL: typologically, it falls inside the SAE, but it collocates at its margins, for its many non-SAE traits (Koutny 2015, Stria 2015, Parkvall 2010, Gledhill 1998, Pennacchietti 1981).

[8] From a typological point of view, IALA's Interlingua is clearly a Romance language, unlike the previous rivals scrutinized by Manders 1947. In comparing it to Esperanto, Carlevaro (2019) rightly talks about 'neolatinization': since Ido until Interlingua, all major IALs cut off the Slavic elements at first, then the Germanic ones, to end up with a sort of regularized vulgar Latin.

reconstruct a community of practice large enough to develop the language and its culture (about Esperanto and WW2, see Lins 2016). After the publication of IALA's Interlingua in 1951, no serious rival of Esperanto was ever proposed, and so Interlinguistics entered a period of 'winter' – in analogy with the period if 'AI winter', when fundings were withdrawn, because of the scarce concrete results of research (Russel and Norvig 2016). In that period, Esperanto found a geopolitical positioning in being a bridge between the East and the West. For example, this pragmatic function was exploited by People's Republic of China to distribute cultural material to the Soviet bloc in the 1950s efficiently (Li 2003). Fians (2024) shows that the Esperanto Movement also had to deal with (self-)cenzorship on its language ideology on geopolitical sensitive matters, while Velitchova (2022) shows the case study of the Esperanto Movement in Bulgaria and its "survival strategy". Nothing similar ever happened to any other IAL proposed: I argue that the geopolitical positioning of Esperanto filled the space that other rivals failed to occupy, and the result is the 'Interlinguistics winter'.

The new Interlinguistics 'spring' started with the advent of the World Wide Web in the 1990s, which coincides with the fall of the USSR and the end of the Cold War in Europe. The world started to become more and more digital, and modernity leaves the place to postmodernity, in the context of Interlinguistics. Even more clearly than before, in the new Millennium we witness a substantial refusal of Eurocentrism, also under the form of its counterpart , Orientalism, defined by Said (2013:93) as such (see also Xypolia 2016):

> Insofar as it was a science of incorporation and inclusion by virtue of which the Orient was constituted and then introduced into Europe, Orientalism was a scientific movement whose analogue in the world of empirical politics was the Orient's colonial accumulation and acquisition by Europe. The Orient was therefore not Europe's interlocutor, but its silent Other.

In the context of Interlinguistics, Orientalism comes under the slightly different form of Exoticism. In fact, in the new Millennium classic IALs – from Volapük to Interlingua passing through Esperanto and Ido – are invariably blamed of Eurocentrism; thus, the reaction is to systematically avoid SAE traits. Klingon is an exemplar in this respect, as Okrand (1992) took the least frequent traits in the world's languages, starting from the basic word order. The idea is that the less frequent, the less human, and therefore, the more alien-like possible (Okrand et al., 2011). The assumption in 'Hollywood linguistics' initiated by Klingon (Gobbo 2014) is that the Other *par excellence,* which is the otherworldly Alien, is prototypically represented as being as far as possible from the European cradle; however, ultimately, the SAE still remains a point of reference, even if negative, *in absentia.*

The language project of Klingon was the first one of this kind of 'exotic' languages (if we take S.A.E. as the starting point, as just explained). Consequently, Okrand had a lot of freedom in constructing the language project: the only constraints were the respect of the original material of the language from the tv series episode – admittedly a few words and expressions, after all. Constraints become more and more strict the more Hollywood languages come out: that is, the more fictional and artistic languages came out for the public, the more the language proponent has to take into account the already published ones so to avoid any unwanted similarity. In fact, the fandoms of fictional universes in Science Fiction and Fantasy are prone to comparisons, and so the untold rule is that any newly constructed language for such a purpose should be not only 'exotic' (in the sense explained above) but also different well-known constructed languages, in particular: Klingon (Okrand 1992, Okrand et al., 2011); Na'vi (from the fictional universe after James Camerons' film *Avatar,* see Schreyer 2012); Dothraki (from the HBO series Games of Thrones, based on George Martin's books, see Iberg 2018 for an overview of its fictional multilingualism); or all (neo)-Tolkienian languages (for an overview, see Hostetter 2007).

5. Concluding remarks

The history of classic IALs shows a lot of protagonists from academia and European intelligentsia. Their primary purpose was very ideal and relevant: peace, diplomacy, science. However, it is without any doubt that even the most serious IAL proponents had also an element of art and creativity, as Bausani (1974, 1970) already noticed. A witness of that aspect is in a private letter by Giuseppe Peano, a renowned mathematician because of his result in analysis and in the axiomatization of arithmetic (Kennedy 2012). Peano entered the arena of Interlinguistics proposing Latino sine Flexione in 1903, and becoming the director of the Academia pro Interlingua in 1908 (Minnaja 2017; not to be confused with IALA's product). He had an intense correspondence with Louis Couturat, mainly on Interlinguistics matters (Luciano, Roero, 2005). In the letter to Giuseppe Vacca, 24 April 1910, conserved in the archive at the University of Turin, Peano motivates his decision to leave University teaching of mathematics, mentioning Interlinguistics (original in Italian, author's translation follows):

> Io abbandono l'insegnamento superiore, contro la mia volontà e con dolore. Ho fatto tutte le mie lezioni, procurando di interessare gli allievi, che si sono effettivamente interessati. Ho procurato di vivere d'accordo con i colleghi, da cui dipendo. Ma questi vogliono che io abbandoni i simboli, che non parli più del Formulario e altro ancora. Rifiutai ogni conferma in queste condizioni. Facevo quel corso per piacere e non per interesse. Così è finita. Difficilmente farò ancora uscire un volume della Rivista. Ho lavorato abbastanza, ed ho il diritto di riposare, tanto più che i colleghi ritengono le mie teorie pericolose. La difesa del Formulario la faccia chi vuole. Del resto esso è un libro già abbastanza noto, e non muore più. Può essere che io dedichi questi ultimi anni alla interlingua, ovvero al giardinaggio.

> [I leave University teaching, against my will and with pain. I delivered all my classes, succeeding in getting students interested, for real. I could make a peaceful life with colleagues from which I depend. But they want me to leave the symbols, to cease speaking about the *Formulario,* and so forth. I refused to be tenure-tracked under such conditions. That course of mine was because of pleasure, not interest. So, it's over. I doubt I will publish another volume of the Rivista. I worked abundantly, and I have the right to rest, considering that my colleagues consider my theories dangerous. The defense of the *Formulario* is in the hands of whoever wants to do it. After all, it is a well-known book, and it won't be forgotten. Perhaps I will devote my last years to the interlanguage, that is to gardening.]

By the end of the letter, Peano speaks of Interlinguistics as 'gardening', that is, nothing too serious, especially if compared with mathematics: a 'hobby for the home', as Tolkien defined it (Fimi, Higgins, 2016). The main lesson learnt from classic Interlinguistics is that, no matter the seriousness of the language project intent, all constructed languages spark from an artistic move, being it admitted explicitly or not, and they contain an element of creativity.

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