

Communication without borders - By: THOMAS BREINSTRUP

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INTERLINGUA IN A GLOBALIZATION PERSPECTIVE

Communication without borders

Globalization demands an extra key to international communication. A living language with well-known words and a grammar without exceptions is already serving the needs of many people both privately and in business. But Interlingua is ready to unlock more doors to the world.

Global communication is exploding, and so is the need *for understanding* each other. Private and business contacts become more and more international, and everybody is communicating all day – even night – long. Language skills, however, are not necessarily good enough, and misunderstandings happen more and more often.

That is the challenge for Interlingua, the modern, international auxiliary language. For more than 50 years it has been a working tool to make communication easier to people from all over the world. It has been used for medical and scientific abstracts in international magazines, musical presentations on CDs, summaries of books published in minor languages, for international conferences and literature in the language itself.

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has given Interlingua an official abbreviation of "Ia", and in Denmark Interlingua has its own entries for manuals and literature in the decimal system that libraries use to organize their books.

The expanding Interlingua literature – translated and original – covers the works of such authors as Arthur Conan Doyle, Hans Christian Andersen, Shakespeare, Anton Chekhov and Nobel Prize winner Harry Martinson as well as other publications, such as the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, books on demography, linguistics, opera, metaphysics, manuals and dictionaries. A digital

library of free e-books in Interlingua is being compiled on the website of the World Interlingua Union, www.interlingua.com.

Hundreds of millions understand it

Unlike other languages, Interlingua is immediately understood by hundreds of millions who may not even have heard of it before. This is possibly due to the use of international vocabulary and a completely standardized grammar. Due to the lack of exceptions, a student can concentrate on getting the words right instead of being stuck in e.g. difficult-to-remember verb conjugations. A lot of Interlingua words are well-known from foreign expressions in your mother tongue or from learning foreign languages. This makes Interlingua much easier and faster to learn – but, of course, you still have to learn it.

International organisation

The International Auxiliary Language Association was established in 1924. In 1955 the Union Mundial pro Interlingua (UMI, World Interlingua Union), a non-profit organisation for international collaboration and promotion of Interlingua, was established by the International Auxiliary Language Association in France and is legally registered in there. Its objective is to facilitate contact, communication and collaboration among independent, national organizations. There are members and representatives on five continents.

At present, the UMI has a Swedish president, a Bulgarian secretary-general, a Dutch vice-secretary, an Italian treasurer, and a Danish editor-in-chief, forming the *Consilio Executive*, which takes care of the daily work. A ten nation *Consilio General* outlines the overall strategy. UMI publishes its bimonthly news magazine, *Panorama* (ISSN 0903-2932), written in Interlingua.

International Interlingua conferences are held every second year, the next in 2009.

The very first Interlingua dictionary and a grammar book were published by the International Auxiliary Language Association (IALA) in 1951. Since then, many other general and specialised dictionaries have appeared, as the vocabulary extends in accordance to the languages which form the base for Interlingua. Presently, the largest Interlingua dictionary is a five-volume Interlingua-Dutch/Dutch-Interlingua dictionary with about 190,000 entries.

The World Interlingua Union (*Union Mundial pro Interlingua*, UMI) was established in 1955. Today, its members and representatives on five continents include (among its *associatos distingueite* (distinguished associates)) the American Nobel Prize Laureate in Economics, Professor James M. Buchanan and the late professor and doctor of linguistics at Sorbonne University in France, André Martinet.

Since 1997, the official motto of the World Interlingua Union has been *Interlingua – communication sin frontieras* (Interlingua – communication without borders).

Not to replace national languages

Interlingua is used to communicate across borders and when other language skills are not enough. It is not intended to replace the national languages.

Shortcut to Italian

More than 95 percent of an average text in an Italian magazine is understood by an Interlingua student without prior knowledge of Italian.

At the Varberg Highschool in Sweden, two students translated a 1,000 word article from the Italian magazine called "*Oggi*" into Swedish without a dictionary or manual, only having studied an Interlingua manual. Of the 1,000 words they translated, the meaning of 13 was guessed and the teacher helped them with 36 others. 49 words remained unidentified.

Similar tests with pupils having studied German for five-six years show that a comprehension of 95 percent of German text from a likewise magazine, *Der Spiegel*, is not always achievable.

"This seems to confirm that learning Interlingua creates an equally solid base for learning Western languages in general as the study of Latin, and as a quick way of learning Romance languages, Interlingua is unsurpassable," says Ingvar Stenström, fil. mag. and secretary of the Swedish Society for Interlingua.

"Interlingua fascinates me, because no one favours imposing it to replace national languages. Interlingua objectively registers existing linguistic reality: it is natural, not artificial – a generic Romance language distilled mainly from Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and the many Romance-Latin-Greek elements of English. It makes use of the international vocabulary of science and technology, as well as other international words borrowed into German, Russian, and many other languages. Indeed, its source languages might well be considered dialects of Interlingua, just as their own dialects have been more or less deliberately standardized in German, Italian, Serbo-Croatian, and other national languages," says Leland B. Yeager, professor emeritus of economics at Auburn University, USA, and former president of the World Interlingua Union (1993-1999).

English is not enough

But doesn't everyone accept English as the international language? No, says Peter Gopsill, chairman of the British Interlingua Society, who has heard this question several times before.

"You could ask why the English force their children to learn French, German and Italian, if it is true that 'everyone accepts English as the international language'. You could ask why the BBC broadcasts programmes in about 40 different languages, if English is the international language. People often suppose that you can go to any country and find an English speaker. It is true that in countries with

small populations, such as the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands, English is widely spoken. Apart from these countries, however, you can only find people who speak English in tourist centres or in big hotels," Peter Gopsill says.

He knows from his many travels abroad that English surely is not enough.

"Although there are many English speakers in the world, who use it either as their first or second language, they only make up, perhaps, 10 percent of the world's population, meaning that 90 percent of the world does *not* speak English," adds Peter Gopsill.

A key to other languages – and your own

Interlingua was developed by the International Auxiliary Language Association between 1924 and 1951 in collaboration with linguists and scientists from all over the world and with financial assistance from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, the Research Corporation and the family of the heiress Alice Vanderbilt Morris, her husband and children, who were deeply interested in the issue of international communication.

Words were deemed international if they occurred in similar forms and with the same meaning in at least three other languages. The form in which a word was standardized in the international vocabulary was the nearest etymological prototype.

That is why Interlingua has been on the curriculum of several upper secondary schools in Sweden since 1967. In a discipline called General Linguistic Knowledge, students learn about foreign words in Swedish. Instead of only a passive knowledge about Greek and Latin morphemes and word-roots, they are taught Interlingua in these schools.

Ingvar Stenström, fil. mag., is one of the teachers who has used Interlingua in school for more than 30 years. He is the secretary of the Swedish Interlingua Society.

"We discovered that General Linguistic Knowledge classes became clearer, more concrete and popular by using Interlingua instead of just teaching the theory. It opens a door (to the Romance languages) to us, Germanic-speaking people, which is really useful. The educational benefits of Interlingua to non-Romance language speaking countries are enormous. Many of my former students still tell me how they use

Interlingua to communicate or to read articles in other languages,” says Ingvar Stenström.

Guess-read newspapers and do business

Interlingua can, thus, be a gift for language lovers and tourists, who are often able to guess-read newspapers in Spanish or Italian and even speak to the local people (they will probably think that the way you speak their mother tongue is far-from-perfect, but they will understand you – the problem might be with the answers you get...). It can also be big business in the globalized world.

“I think that it was Winston Churchill who once said that nothing is impossible – the impossible just takes a little more time. In the same way, it is just a matter of surmounting the impediments to make Interlingua more known and used. People from Asia and Africa will have even more advantage of learning Interlingua than Europeans. The efforts required are really not that big, but it will make them understand, for example, technological and scientific texts without having to learn Spanish, Italian, etc. It will also ease communication between them,” says Ingvar Stenström.

Interlingua will be their shortcut into technical and scientific Western literature.

“Introducing Interlingua in Chinese, Japanese, and African schools will be very useful and will certainly be worth the investment. Communication will become easier, and the learners will also be able to communicate orally about everyday matters, with the parts of Europe and Southern America that speak Spanish, Italian and Portuguese”, he adds.

This summer Ingvar Stenström is going to teach at a three-day intensive Interlingua course at the Nordic Interlingua Conference in Linköping, Sweden. This is the 11th biannual Nordic conference since 1988, where people from Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland will meet to talk about how to make Interlingua more known and used.

UNESCO’s goodwill ambassador for languages, the former Icelandic president Vigdis Finnbogadóttir, has been the patron of these Nordic get-togethers, which attract participants from as far away as Japan.

Stay neutral, speak international

Language neutrality is a major reason for promoting Interlingua as the modern instrument of international communication. If you have to use

a language other than your mother tongue, it is always an "away match".

"There is an economic and professional advantage for a language group to use its mother tongue. People can think in their own language, negotiate, and express themselves better in writing, radio and television broadcasting etc. From the cultural point of view, a neutral language is a buffer between people from multicultural and multilingual areas. A neutral language cannot convey any threats," says Peter Gopsill, chairman of the British Interlingua Society.

The introduction of Interlingua will save time and money.

"Translating into six different languages demands six times the effort. Translation into one interlanguage – Interlingua – demands a single effort at a fraction of the costs and time. Such costs concern not only institutions like the United Nations or the European Union, they also concern all international negotiations in general," he adds with reference to the costs of interpreters, translators, paper, space, financial losses because of misunderstandings etc.

Fully functional language

The European Union has the largest translation and interpretation services in the world to serve the now 23 official languages (Welsh to become the 24th this year). This means 506 possible language combinations. In 2007, the 2,500 translators produced two million pages of text, and the 500 interpreters are supplemented by 300-400 freelance interpreters per day. The annual expenditure on translation and interpretation in the EU is calculated at 1,1 billion euros every year until 2013.

"Taking into consideration the specific way modern global society develops the position of an international language, promoted by an NGO, is particularly important. The means to facilitate international communication such as the English language, are already laden with too many political connotations and practically hamper a real, deep and respectful exchange of ideas. The nature of such unilateral instruments, where one of the parties is clearly in an advantageous position, cannot be accepted as a basis for further development. Therefore, a rather wise step was taken by the European Union: despite being impractical, the acceptance of all the languages of the member countries as official establishes that no one should be disadvantaged", says Petyo Angelov, the Bulgarian secretary-general of the World Interlingua Union.

The next step, justified mainly by practical reasons, should include Interlingua as a fully functional language within the EU.

"[Interlingua] is easy to master and rich enough for all the needs of a political, cultural and even personal communication. Its neutrality concerning all the social issues is a major advantage and the principles of its construction and of the vocabulary selection give it a more pragmatic value in comparison with other candidates for an auxiliary international language," adds the secretary-general.

His opinion is supported by Michael Powell, a conference interpreter and former freelancer at the European Parliament, who calls Interlingua "as easy as falling off a log".

"Interlingua bears the hallmark of professional linguists," he says.

Key to the world

The United Nations has declared 2008 the international year of languages. According to UNESCO, more than 50 percent of the 6,700 languages spoken in the world today are in danger of disappearing within one to four generations. 90 percent of them are not even represented on the Internet.

Five minutes in Interlingua

Lection un (1): Interlingua es un lingua international – un collection de parolas international, arrangiate in un simple systema grammatic. Le lingua es neutral e es pro personas de differente nationalitates. In julio un grande conferentia de interlingua occurre in Svedia. Multe daneses es presente.

Quick grammar

- Interlingua's grammar is completely without exceptions and, thus, can be written in a single A4 sheet.
- Am/are/is = *es*, takes place = *occurre* in all persons.
- The indefinite article for nouns is always *un* (a, an – no difference in gender), the definite article always *le* (the – no difference in singular/plural): *un lingua – le lingua* = a language – the language.
- Plural is formed by adding *_s* (after a consonant *_es*): *duo (2) linguas, tres (3) collectiones, multe daneses* (many Danes).
- Adjectives are normally placed after the nouns, the most common ones often before them: *parolas diferente* (different words), *un grande conferentia* (a big conference), *personas presente* (present persons).

Quick wordlist: *de:* of, about – *e:* and – *pro:* for – *Svedia:* Sweden

The Internet means that even people in the more remote areas of the world are able to get Interlingua learning material, hear how the language is pronounced and start using it. Computer programmes like

Skype and chat groups provide great opportunities for using it in real life – to communicate without borders.

“Interlingua assures a better education and more knowledge by giving access to information – in a short time and in a fun way. Especially after closing the last lesson of the book, the world opens up,” says Ingvar Stenström of the Swedish Interlingua Society.

Or, in the words of his fellow-countryman, Bengt Enqvist, who will also be teaching Interlingua again this summer: “Because Interlingua is understood by about 600 million people who speak Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese, you would benefit from it, even if you were the only person in the world who spoke Interlingua. It is a fantastic experience to think about *what* to say instead of *how* to say it.”

SUMMARIO IN INTERLINGUA *Interlingua es le moderne lingua auxiliar, le instrumento de communication international. Milliones comprende interlingua a prime vista. Le grammatica es minimal e totalmente regular. Interlingua ha un organisation global con representantes e membros in cinque continentes. Le litteratura in interlingua – scientific e belletristic, original e traducite – es comprehensive.*

AUTHOR



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Further information: Union Mundial pro Interlingua
www.interlingua.com

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