Learn Esperanto!

Pierre Ramus

1907

Doing one thing doesn't mean leaving the other! And it's very easy for every comrade to practice their native language, to give it that individual strength that truly does justice to the expression of their personality, to enhance its formal beauty—and at the same time to be a good Esperantist.

About nine months ago, Landauer's statements would have met with my unconditional approval. I advocated them myself back then, using the same logic and the same arguments. And this logic of mine—notoriously insidious!—was strengthened and significantly enhanced by reading an article by Max Nettlau in the London newspaper "Freedom" entitled "An Anarchist's View of Esperanto." There, too, the same claims were made, denying Esperanto any deeper intimacy and potential for internalization—just as Landauer does, as I have done, as countless others still do.

Nevertheless, we were wrong; At least I, who studied Esperanto very cursorily and was only trying to acquire something like the ability to read the language, must admit this today. And the arguments I used, and which Landauer is now citing again, have only the deceptive appearance of correctness. In truth, we deceive ourselves about their soundness and completely fail to recognize and overlook the fact that the thing we have seemingly refuted has already demonstrated its vitality and thus its legitimacy through massive evidence, and has already undergone so many stages of development, perfection and improvement, that it is quite impossible that Esperanto could ever disappear again.

I am happy to admit that from a certain aesthetic standpoint, I must agree with Comrade L. But aesthetics plays a conceivably minor role in the questions of daily hardship and its confusion, for which, and thus for the overcoming of which, Esperanto was created. And don't be alarmed by the little word "created," compared to which Landauer's use seems far prettier and only seemingly more natural. For it only emphasizes half the point when I say that our languages are something "grown," or something that has become, not something made. In any case, the fact is that this growth signifies their creation and creation, unless one wants to view this growth as something purely mechanical, which Landauer does not. And in such a sense, Esperanto, too, is something "grown," something that grew and emerged because it meets very eminent needs and that, continuing to grow in the flow of its development of use, will achieve a future, and thus a past. After all, everything has grown, gradually become, but nothing that wasn't made simultane-

ously; the action provides the impetus, development and becoming follow after it. Even existing languages have an infinite amount of madeness in them!

Esperantists have never made it their mission to abolish or obliterate the differences between languages, all that wonderful diversity that has emerged from millennia of development and that creates the charm of life, the "splendid gestures" of different nations, expressing their passions and dispositions in colorful diversity. Comrade Landauer, Esperantists have always emphasized that Esperanto is only an auxiliary language for everyday use and the most necessary intellectual communication, in short, that it may be used precisely for the "crudeness, trivialities, and ordinariness" of life—and unfortunately, life consists largely of precisely such inadequacies. But if you believe that Esperanto is also misleading and unsuitable because different nations think and therefore speak in their own specific national idiosyncrasies, then you have expressed a profound truth, which Mauthner, in particular, vividly points out in his "Critique of Language." I by no means deny the correctness of this assertion, but I would like to assert that it applies not only to Esperanto, but to every language, that the fatality of the language of even one and the same people—of course, we can only imagine such a people philosophically—is that it is spoken by individuals who, thanks to their varying hereditary influences and the gradual differences in their sensory and psychological impressionability, also only understand each other misunderstandings and can never fully understand each other. Nevertheless, just as the common national language allows individuals of different dispositions to communicate on the general questions of their existence, Esperanto also allows, or rather, enables, this among individuals of different nations. Its development is not yet foreseeable, and with each introduction into wider and wider circles, it gains such elements of flexibility, literal meaning, and generalization of the self-evident—and this is what language actually means to us—that its future evolution becomes a matter of assurance.

Certainly: let us acquire all that beautiful clarity and richness of language that our classics have left us as a sublime legacy. But let us also enrich it! And the possibility of going to a foreign land and, at the moment of my arrival, calling out a few mutual, heartfelt words to those who are no longer "foreigners," of being able to speak with them immediately about the necessities and needs of my personality—not only does none of the existing national languages offer this possibility to the proletarian, but for the newcomer, its realization means the expansion of their intellectual horizons on the most significant scale, an immediate, rapidly acquired sharpness of observation, which can also have a retroactive effect on their proficiency in their mother tongue. Esperanto is the everyday, necessary practice of exchanging ideas; Esperanto can become that broad linguistic stream on whose back all the cultural elements of the various nations can be brought reciprocally and in an internationalizing way to the diverse shores and coasts of their homeland.

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