

A Scientific Approach to Language Policy: The *Gesellschaft für Interlinguistik*¹ (Interlinguistics Society), Berlin.

Seán Ó Riain

The German interlinguistics society *Gesellschaft für Interlinguistik* (GIL) was founded in Berlin in 1991 by twelve German interlinguists to bring together interlinguistics and esperantology scholars, mainly in Germany. GIL's principal fields of activity are the dissemination of interlinguistic knowledge, the promotion and support of relevant research and teaching, and the support of national and international cooperation among interlinguists. GIL concentrates its activities in four fields: (a) international linguistic communication, (b) language planning, (c) esperantology (Esperanto studies), and (d) the teaching of Esperanto and interlinguistics at institutions of higher education. Since 1995 GIL has published the proceedings of its annual conferences as *Beiträge der Gesellschaft für Interlinguistik*. Twelve volumes have appeared to date, on such topics as translation, terminology, sociocultural aspects of planned languages, lexicography, European language policy, and the structure of planned languages. The thirteenth volume is to be published in book form by Peter Lang in mid-2007. It is worth considering Blanke's call that the European Commission consider commissioning a report by a committee of experts on whether a planned language can contribute to European integration and the maintenance of multilingualism, and on the factual achievements of Esperanto in international communication to date.

References to Esperanto are sometimes greeted by a wry smile conveying a "been there, done that, what's next?" attitude. In the present writer's experience, this reaction is as common in professional linguistic circles as among fellow diplomats, to whom the science of interlinguistics appears as little known as it is to the wider public. Readers of LPLP constitute a significant exception. In an area more characterized by prejudice than hard scientific knowledge, the twelve volumes of GIL (*Gesellschaft für Interlinguistik*) proceedings represent an important linguistic contribution towards remedying this lacuna. Crucial in maintaining the lack of knowledge of planned languages is a failure to appreciate the fundamental difference between the over 1,000 planned language projects and the one such language, Esperanto, which has gone through each of the 28 stages of development outlined by Blanke² to become a fully functional language, used intensively and increasingly by a worldwide language community.³ Even a little familiarity with

¹ <http://www.interlinguistik-gil.de/>

² Blanke 2001: 53-57, in Schubert 2001.

³ Evidence of the actual use of Esperanto, and of the existence of a specific Esperanto culture, is provided by Chiti-Batelli 1987, Janton 1993, Piron 1994, Gledhill 1998, Nuessel 2000, Ó Riain 2001, Zajt 2002. Its use in diplomacy is testified by (former Australian Ambassador) Harry 1994 and Ó Riain 2001.

developments in interlinguistics⁴ should help dispel what Piron (1994: 257) calls *l'ignorance ignorée*⁵

The German interlinguistics society Gesellschaft für Interlinguistik e.V. was founded in Berlin by twelve German interlinguists on 6 April 1991. It elected Dr. Habil. Detlev Blanke, whose seminal role and continued guidance garners an appropriate tribute through an impressive festschrift for his 60th birthday (Fiedler & Liu 2001⁶), as its first President. The festschrift is complemented by the appearance in 2006 of a collection of Blanke's seminal work, *Interlinguistische Beiträge*⁷. The Society's aims are to bring together interlinguistics and esperantology scholars, mainly in Germany, and to increase their activity; to heighten awareness of, and facilitate access to, international specialist literature as it appears; to promote the interchange of expertise and the publication of members' work; and to provide an opportunity for activity in the framework of a professional linguistic organization. GIL's principal fields of activity are the dissemination of interlinguistic knowledge and the promotion and support of relevant research and teaching, and the support of national and international cooperation among interlinguists. It concentrates its activities in four fields: (a) international linguistic communication, (b) language planning, (c) esperantology (Esperanto studies), and (d) the teaching of Esperanto and interlinguistics at universities and institutions of higher education.

Although essentially a German organization, GIL also has members from Austria, China, Finland, Hungary, Japan, Croatia, the Netherlands, Poland and Switzerland. The Society publishes the bibliographical bulletin *Interlinguistische Informationen*, of which 59 issues have appeared. GIL organizes a specialist conference each year, and has published the proceedings since its fifth conference (1995).⁸

As of 1995 GIL has published the proceedings of its annual conferences as *Beiträge der Gesellschaft für Interlinguistik*, under the editorship of Detlev Blanke, Ulrich Becker and Fritz Wollenberg. Twelve volumes, all published in Berlin, have appeared to date:

1. *Translation in Plansprachen*, 1996. 71 pp.
2. *Terminologiewissenschaftliche Aspekte der Interlinguistik*, 1997. 51 pp.
3. *Eine Sprache für die Wissenschaft*, 1998. 120 pp.
4. *Soziokulturelle Aspekte von Plansprachen*, 1998. 60 pp.
5. *Interlinguistik und Lexikographie*, 1999. 91 pp. + 33 pp.
6. *Sprachenpolitik in Europa*, 2001. 161 pp.
7. *Zur Struktur von Plansprachen*, 2001. 159 pp.
8. *Plansprachen und ihre Gemeinschaften*, 2002. 161 pp.

⁴ Fiedler & Liu 2001 contains scholarly articles by 43 authors from 19 countries. Fiedler 1999 establishes conclusively the existence of a substantial body of phraseology in Esperanto, honed by almost 120 years of usage and comparable to national languages. Schubert 2001 ranges from the role of literary language in Esperanto (Tonkin) through lexicography (Duc Goninaz), speech processing (Koutny) to Creoles and pidgins (Liu).

⁵ Claude Piron of Geneva University details the glaring errors of eight linguists in his recent article „L'Ignorance Ignorée”, <http://claudepiron.free.fr/articlesenfrancais/linguistes2.htm>.

⁶ It contains 43 contributions from scholars in 19 countries, some two-thirds in Esperanto and one-third in German.

⁷ Blanke 2006 brings together 14 published articles by one of the foremost German interlinguists, together with a very valuable 52-page bibliography indicating the range of this branch of linguistics.

⁸ The first, founding conference took place on 6 April 1991, with no framework program. The second (16-18 October 1992) dealt with "Interlinguistic Aspects of European Language Policy," the third (15-17 October 1993) with "Linguistics and Interlinguistics," and the fourth (18-20 November 1994) with "Esperantology".

9. *Plansprachen und elektronische Medien*, 2003. 201 pp.
10. *Terminologiewissenschaft und Plansprachen*, 2003. 160 pp.
11. *Spracherfindung – Sprachplanung – Plansprachen*, 2004. 158 pp.
12. *Internationale Plansprachen – Entwicklung und Vergleich*, 2005. 120 pp.

The proceedings of the 15th GIL conference are to be published by Peter Lang in mid-2007.

Each volume contains 8-14 academic contributions by interlinguistics specialists, and an introduction by Detlev Blanke. An exception is volume three, which has just four contributions from a colloquium in memory of Nobel Prize-winning scientist and interlinguist Wilhelm Ostwald (1853-1932), who perceptively foresaw many of the negative effects of the international dominance of an ethnic language which have developed since his death (p. 21, 28)⁹. The published proceedings consist of a total of 120 contributions. Most focus on planned languages, but by no means exclusively on Esperanto, whose linguistic and meta-linguistic features are often compared to those of competing language projects.

Arguably the most topical volume, as we approach a further European Union enlargement on 1 January 2007 which will bring the number of EU official working languages to 23¹⁰, is *Sprachenpolitik in Europa*, which appeared in 2001. The Commission decision to designate a commissioner solely responsible for multilingualism from 1 January 2007 adds to its topicality. It contains contributions on multilingualism – curse or blessing (Mattusch), the typological richness of European languages (Lötzsch), Russian as an international language (Kostomarov), the French view on language policy (Klare), planned languages and European language policy (Blanke), an epilogue to the conference on language policy in Europe (Scharnhorst), forestry terminology (Simon and Ullrich), the translation of Goethe's *Faust* into Esperanto (Fiedler), "Does Europe exist? What is European?" (Barandovská-Frank), and a useful bibliography on language policy in Europe (Blanke/Scharnhorst). Mattusch (p. 21) quotes UNFPA figures predicting that in 2050 neither French, German nor Italian will be among the 20 most spoken languages. They will be replaced by Turkish, Persian and Amharic, with Swahili possibly replacing Korean, English dropping to place three, behind Chinese and Hindi, and Russian holding its position. A further striking prediction is that the current 10% Spanish-speaking population of the US may increase to 25% by 2050. It is difficult to quarrel with Blanke's conclusion (p. 100): "To avoid future conflicts in Europe, language policy must be formulated democratically, particularly in the EU framework."

It is clear that the principles of effective communication and the equal rights of all EU citizens may clash. The present drift towards English as the EU *lingua franca* tends to reinforce inequality between the 12% of native speakers of English and everybody else. Grin 2005 shows how this brings enormous benefits, of some € 17-18 billion per year, to the British economy, and points out that the EU essentially has a choice between the alternatives of English only, multilingualism, or a role for Esperanto. Phillipson 2003 makes a strong case against allowing this drift to continue, and (p. 184) in favor of serious consideration of a role for Esperanto in areas such as "a bridging or pivot language... for EU-internal communication," or pilot studies on the possible contribution of short preliminary courses in Esperanto to improving language

⁹ See also Phillipson 2003 and Cushing 1994.

¹⁰ Irish is added on this date, as decided by the Council on 13 June 2005, as are the languages of the new member states, Romanian and Bulgarian.

learning in general.¹¹ EU enlargement is clearly dictating more overt consideration of language policy. The need for an “EU standing conference of politicians and linguists” to establish and guide this discussion is stressed by Scharnhorst (p. 110).

Volume one in the series is devoted to translation and planned languages, and contains eleven contributions mainly on translation into Esperanto, but also on Greek, and cataloguing in Esperanto libraries. An introduction by Blanke explains GIL’s *raison d’être* and underlines the key role played by translation in Esperanto’s evolution from a project to a living language. Also covered are machine translation, translation models, translation in structured finance, phraseology, dictionaries to promote active use of a foreign language, geographical names, culinary terms, and a general article on Esperanto in Greece. As an Irish-speaker I was struck by Back’s use (p. 58) of the Irish names of the continents as examples: *Eoraip, Áise, Afraic, Meiriceá, Astráil*. This serves to illustrate an unresolved dilemma in geographical nomenclature: the clash of the principles of “name-bearer’s right” (to have a particular version of a name used without variation) and “language right” (to adapt geographical names to the sound system of the country in question). As for Esperanto, while the importance of an original literature was understood by Esperanto speakers from the outset, in contrast to the users of other planned languages such as Ido, the continuing importance of translation to enriching the expressiveness of a planned language cannot be gainsaid.

Volume two concentrates on terminological problems. Its eight articles deal with forestry terms, the borrowing of international terms versus the use of native resources in Esperanto and German, numerals, the Internet, Esperanto’s less successful offshoots, and other topics. Of note is Wera Blanke’s article on the contribution of interlinguists to the international organization of terminological work in general, in which she illustrates the important roles of Eugen Wüster and Ernest Drezen. The latter was executed during Stalin’s purges (p. 6). Two points from Fellman’s comparison of the adoption of “international” words by German and Esperanto are noteworthy: first, the average German need far fewer word roots to express an equal quantity of concepts than the average English-speaker, because of the very different histories of the two languages (p. 20); and, second, in computer terminology the intensive dialogue between Esperanto speakers on the Internet since 1994 has often led to the replacement of an “international” but opaque word by a more transparent and intrinsically Esperanto term (e.g. “*sekurigi*” and “*programaro*” for earlier “*savi*” and “*softvaro*”, p. 23).

Volume four has eleven articles on the socio-cultural aspects of planned languages, two of which, in breach of GIL practice that all formal proceedings be conducted in German, are in Ido and Interlingua. There is a report by Barandovská-Frank of a world congress in “living Latin”, attended by 300 participants (in contrast to 2,000-3,500 at its Esperanto equivalents), and two contributions on the German orthographic reform (Back and Löttsch). This is certainly one of the more interesting volumes for the non-initiated, as it is for the most part accessible to a person who has never learned a word of a planned language. Fiedler’s contribution, based on analysis of a survey of 528 replies to a questionnaire from 45 countries, deepens our understanding of the Esperanto community. Bormann reflects on his own experience of societal change in recent decades and their effects on the Esperanto community. One of Dungert’s conclusions (p. 53) is provocative: “It is not the fault of Esperanto that it contains possibilities which do not exist, or do not exist to the same extent, in national languages.”

¹¹ See Corsetti & La Torre 2001.

Volume five contains nine contributions on lexicography, including one on Bahasa Indonesia (Krause), and an annex presenting extracts from the various kinds of dictionaries discussed. The conference theme was timely as it took place a few months after the publication of Erich-Dieter Krause's monumental *Grosses Wörterbuch Esperanto-Deutsch*, containing some 80,000 head-words and copious examples of usage. Blanke's survey of dictionaries in planned languages is informative, and is concluded by an eight-page bibliography of such dictionaries. The sheer range and volume of dictionaries available in Esperanto is impressive (see Ockey 1982), and Blanke touches on a point (p. 18) which may not be apparent to the non-specialist: it is superfluous to list many Esperanto words, which derive regularly from a root-word, e.g. adjectives, as all substantives can produce corresponding adjectives, as necessary, by a simple ending-change. A further salient point (p. 19) relates to the largely invented Interlingua word stock, in contrast to the Esperanto vocabulary which is drawn from actual usage. Fiedler's contribution on Esperanto phraseology is also noteworthy.

Volume seven has nine articles on the structure of planned languages, including Ido, Latino sine flexione, Occidental, Interlingua, Loglan, and Klingon, as well as Esperanto. Anton's and Fiedler's articles compare the structure and development of Esperanto with that of its offshoot, Ido, the former grammatically and the latter phraseologically. Günkel writes on criticisms of the structure of Esperanto, and on attempts to address these in subsequent planned language projects. A broad tentative conclusion from this volume seems to indicate that the relative success of Esperanto, when measured against all rivals, has little to do with linguistic structure. Neither any of the "improvements" on Esperanto, nor the naturalistic Interlingua and similar projects, led to more widespread use or recognition. On the contrary, the stability of Esperanto over more than a century, and its internal coherence in actual usage throughout the world, probably helped it outdistance all rivals. In any case, a dispassionate examination such as this volume contains, with contributions from advocates of Ido and Interlingua, is very useful.

Volume eight deals with planned languages and their communities in fourteen articles. Their subjects include the *Academia pro Interlingua* (Barandovská-Frank), Ido (Anton), Occidental/Interlingue (Back), Interlingua (Wilshusen), "living Latin" (Fritsch), "Comics – the Esperanto of the Illiterate" (Fiedler), Klingon (Mannewitz), a sociological survey of the speakers of Esperanto (Stocker), the Swiss planned languages encyclopedia project and the Swiss contribution to planned languages movements (Künzli), forestry terms (Simon/Weckwerth/Weidner), the gender neutrality of the Esperanto pronoun system (Fischer), the metaphorical use of the term "Esperanto" (Blanke), and language planning in Ireland (Ó Riain). This last article presents similarities between the problems faced by planned languages and by a national language which is not widely used. The general thrust of this volume underlines a fact which may surprise the non-specialist: that planned languages do have communities, albeit only Esperanto has a community of sufficient range and depth to make it of interest to sociologists as well as linguists, as illustrated by Stocker's fascinating survey.

The proceedings of GIL constitute a veritable treasure trove for all who are interested in international communication, and GIL itself plays an important role in the scholarly community and beyond. Indeed the overall organization and activity of GIL could with profit be copied by those interested in interlinguistics in other countries.

How can EU language policy profit from the activities of organizations such as GIL? Principally by adopting a more rational approach to this important area of European integration, in my view. The designation of a member of the Commission to have sole responsibility for multilingualism is substantial progress. Some commentaries on the proposed appointment, particularly from members of the European Parliament, suggested that multilingualism was not important enough to occupy a commissioner's full attention. It is clear that the need for a comprehensive EU language policy, aimed at combining effectiveness and efficiency in communication with the preservation of Europe's linguistic and cultural diversity, has not yet been grasped, even in the European Parliament. In conclusion, I would like to quote from a lecture¹² by Dr.Habil. Detlev Blanke of Berlin (my translation):

“It is hardly to be expected that the political will may emerge in the EU in the foreseeable future to give serious consideration to a possible working language role for a planned language such as Esperanto. It is, however, to be recommended that the EU commission an experts' report which – as once done by the League of Nations – would at least establish the factual position, perhaps with a title such as “Esperanto's Achievements to date as an International Means of Communication”. The role that may be played in the future by Esperanto or another planned language depends to a large extent on the will of politicians and their advisers, who should at least be informed.”

I heartily endorse Dr Blanke's call. It is only on the basis of factual, objective material that a future comprehensive EU language policy can be framed.

END

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¹² “Sprachenpolitische Aspekte internationaler Plansprachen Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Esperanto“, in proceedings of the 15th GIL annual conference, 2005, to be published by Peter Lang in mid-2007.

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Resumo

Sciensa aliro al lingvopolitiko: La interlingvistika societo Gesellschaft für Interlinguistik

La interlingvistika societo Gesellschaft für Interlinguistik (GIL), Berlino, estis fondita en 1991 de dekdu germanaj interlingvistoj cele al interkontaktado de fakuloj pri interlingvistiko kaj esperantologio, ĉefe en Germanio. La ĉefaj kampoj de aktivado de GIL estas disvastigo de interlingvistika scio, antaŭenigo kaj subteno de koncernaj esploroj kaj instruado, kaj apogo de nacia kaj internacia kunlaboro inter interlingvistoj. Emfaziĝas en la agado de GIL kvar kampoj: (a) internacia lingvistika komunikado, (b) lingvoplanado, (c) esperantologio, kaj (ĉ) la instruado de Esperanto kaj interlingvistiko en universitatnivelaĵoj institucioj. Ek de 1995 GIL aperigas la aktojn de siaj jaraj konferencoj kiel *Beiträge der Gesellschaft für Interlinguistik*. Dek du volumoj aperis ĝis nun, pri temoj kiel ekzemple tradukado, terminologio, socikulturaj aspektoj de planlingvoj, leksikografio, eŭropa lingvopolitiko, kaj la strukturo de planlingvoj. La dek tria voluma aperos meze de 2007, ĉe Peter Lang. Indas konsideri la alvoko de D-ro Blanke, ke la EU komisiu sciencan, objektivan raporton de ekspertoj pri la ĝisnunaj atingoj de Esperanto en la kampo de internacia komunikado. Necesas tia objektiva materialo por konstrui taŭgan EU-lingvopolitikon.

Speaker's address

Permanent Representation of Ireland to the European Union
Rue Froissart 89-93
B-1040 Brussels
Belgium

sean.oriain@dfa.ie
www.seanoriain.eu

About the speaker

Seán Ó Riain (Ph.D., Trinity College, Dublin) has published research on language planning in Ireland and Québec (Ó Riain 1994). His diplomatic career has included Poland, Australia, Austria, Germany and now the EU, Brussels. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ireland, Brian Cowen, launched his booklet on EU language policy (Ó Riain 2001) on 12 July 2001.