

[85] Nitobe

Quando Nitobe Inazô, nel 1921, sottosegretario generale della Lega delle Nazioni, presentò il suo report “Esperanto and the Language Question at the League of Nations” a seguito della visita al 13° Congresso Universale di Esperanto a Praga (leggibile in rete all’indirizzo: http://en.nitobe.info/ld/dokumentujo/dokumentoj/nc_dokumento-18-enkonduko3_en.pdf), non si sarebbe immaginato che, a distanza di 86 anni, al 5° Simposio dedicato al suo nome (Nitobe-Symposium “European Languages and Asian Nations – History, Politics, Possibilities”, tenuto alla Sophia University di Tokio, organizzato dal Center for Research and Documentation in Word Language Problems [CRD] e dell’European Institute della Sophia University, insieme con il Japana Esperanto Instituto e la Simul International), organizzato proprio nel suo Paese, quel tema sarebbe stato eletto a “key term” e la sua figura definita, da Sato Masahito, come costruttrice di sette ponti: 1) fra Oriente e Occidente; 2) fra campagna e città; 3) fra studio e vita quotidiana; 4) fra uomini e donne; 5) fra classicità e modernità; 6) fra ideale e reale; 7) fra tempo ed eternità.

Nitobe, inizialmente laureato in agronomia ma poi specializzato negli studi giuridici, si può considerare un esempio eccezionale di collegamento fra la cultura orientale e quella occidentale, a cominciare dalla sua conversione al Cristianesimo, alle sue permanenze prolungate negli Stati Uniti (dove si sposò) e in Germania, al suo insegnamento in un programma di collaborazione fra università americane e giapponesi, Fu sempre un pacifista, e dopo la prima guerra mondiale partecipò alla fondazione della sezione giapponese dell’Istituto per le Relazioni Pacifiche. Fu autore di numerosi libri, il più noto dei quali in occidente è *Bushido: l’anima del Giappone*, uscito nel 1900.

Riportiamo *excerpta* dal report sopra ricordato, che Nitobe presentò in data 31 agosto 1921 alla League of Nations e che sembrano ricalcare problematiche linguistiche della piena contemporaneità.

PART II. – OBSERVATIONS ON THE ESPERANTO MOVEMENT.

It is a mere platitude to assert that there is no barrier between nations harder to overcome than language. It is a barrier that does not stop at the tongue, as it strikes its root in the manner of expressing thought and often in the very spring of thought itself. The difference in language was identified with that of race and was regarded as a just reason for enmity, as is hinted in such terms as Babel, barbarian, balbus, etc. This linguistic barrier is now increasing with the rise of new nationalities. In Europe alone forty-nine languages are in actual use. Suppose each desires to be heard! Hence the urgent need of a common language is more than ever felt.

But which shall it be? The so-called dead languages can hardly be resuscitated. Among the living languages, much as English is spread beyond Anglo-Saxon lands and precise as French is, to propose either as an international medium would be to arouse antagonism, for fear of undue political and commercial preponderance of their native speakers. The only existing tongue that was seriously advanced for candidature of world-language was Norwegian, because of its comparative simplicity and its immunity from national jealousy. It is doubtful how seriously M. Paul Chappelier’s proposal of concluding a linguistic treaty whereby England and the United States shall make the teaching of French compulsory in English and American schools, and that of English in French schools, will be taken up in these countries. Moreover, as one of the greatest linguists (H. Sweet) has said, all national languages are equally difficult. It is a very true remark of M. M. Breal that a national language would have more to lose than to gain from being internationalised, as it would be travestied and lose its own character and originality.

A neutral language claiming no nationality most certainly stands the best chance of general adoption. A very common objection that an artificial language has no life cannot carry much weight. Automobiles have no life but they are doing the work of horses very much better without, however, blotting them out of existence. In the last 250 years, ever since Descartes advanced the idea of a "philosophical language" there were proposed about one hundred different lingual systems artificially created. Some of them were no better than the intellectual pastime of linguists. Most of them were biased in favour of one or another natural language, though it is a significant fact that the inventors are never partial to their native speech. It cannot be too strongly emphasised, as there is a wide-spread misconception on this point, that in the later attempts at artificial languages a universal philosophical language is not sought after, but rather an auxiliary international language – a linguistic scheme designed for use side by side with a native speech. The purpose of such a scheme is not to supplant but to supplement the mother-tongue of various countries. It aspires to do for different peoples what "musical notation does for musicians, flag-signalling at sea for sailors and signs for mathematicians." It will not hurt any national language any more than stenography will calligraphy. [...]

Of the ease with which it can be mastered, compared with natural languages, there is no doubt, as has been testified by experience and experiments. With those who are specially endowed with the gift of tongues, it is no exaggeration to say that it is a matter of a few hours to be able to read Esperanto. Clark, the author of "International Language", estimates that the ease of learning Esperanto is three to five times as great as mastering the "unnecessary" difficulties of a natural language. The late Sir William Ramsay was of opinion that "an English child can learn Esperanto in at most six months, so as to be able to read, speak and write it." As to the vocabulary, which is based on two or three thousand root-words, whoever knows any modern European language will easily recognise many familiar words. It is said that the labour of learning the words of a language is five times greater than learning the grammar. Esperantists calculate that 75 per cent. of their vocabulary is of French derivation, 65 per cent. English and 50 per cent. German.

[...] while the linguists may be disputing, the need of a world language is growing daily more pressing.

The urgency of the question finds expression in the Association for the Creation of a Universal Language Bureau, which was founded in 1911 with its seat in Berne. Its object is to prepare and promote diplomatic action with a view to establishing a Universal Language Union between the various nations and creating a Universal Language Bureau whose duty it shall be, acting for the Union, to introduce, develop and apply an officially recognised international auxiliary language. The Association, officially "maintains the strictest neutrality in regard to existing systems of international auxiliary language or any which may subsequently come into existence"; but its impartiality has been somewhat suspected on account of the predominance of Idists in the official staff. From my knowledge of this particular Association it must be said that it has been greatly impaired in its activity by the War and seems to be still suffering from its effects. In its present quiescent state, this Association, which aspires to be an arbiter and mediator in the strife of tongues, watches on the one hand its mantle falling upon another new, vigorous, scientific body (the International Research Council), which will carry on investigations into the whole subject; and on the other hand the great strides in propaganda taken by the Esperantists. If the legal fiction that "possession is nine points of the law" be applied, it must be owned that Esperanto does to all appearance have every advantage at present.

PART III. – THE LANGUAGE QUESTION & THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

[...] I hope I am not going too far if I dare suggest to the Secretary-General the importance of calling sooner or later the attention of the Council and of the Assembly to the question of an international language. M. Hanotaux remarked in the first Assembly that "the question of languages, the solution of which presents many difficulties, is not yet ripe for discussion". I shall not dispute the assertion of this eminent Academician, especially as I believe he meant the

question is still immature for discussion in the Assembly; but I presume he will admit that the question has now reached the stage where it is not merely academic, but where, for practical reasons, it can no longer be ignored. I believe there are particular reasons why the League of Nations should take up this subject. I even believe that the League is committed to the task of its solution.

(1) [...] the question of recognising [...] an official language of the League. [...]

(2) *Need of an auxiliary language in the League of Nations for adequate representation.* [...]

(3) *Need of an authority to endorse an artificial language.* [...]

(4) *Need as a check to increasing natural languages.* [...]

(5) *Need for an international language in commerce.* [...]

(6) *Need for a common language in science.* [...]

(7) *Need felt for an international language in the labour world.* [...]

(8) In the preceding paragraphs I have advanced no new arguments, having simply presented some facts under different headings to prove that many powerful organisations, with very different objects and covering very wide fields of human activity, are seeking for the practical solution of the universal language. That the world's progress is impeded by linguistic barriers is a statement no longer to be despised as a platitude. It embodies a serious menace to the cause of peace.

The League should profit by the voice of those individuals or organisations which have had long experience in dealing with international meetings.

In September 1920, at the World Congress of the Union of International Associations at Brussels, a resolution was passed unanimously (with the exception of one vote for the French language) recommending to all interested in the progress of the world-language problem that these should join the Esperanto movement, and should postpone all theoretical discussion about linguistic details until the language be officially adopted by inter-governmental decision. If frequent references are made to Esperanto in this report, where I am treating of an international language in general, it is not because I espouse its cause (for I do not – at least, not yet), but because it supplies the best examples.

In the 10th meeting of the International Co-operative Alliance held recently (August 1921) in Basle, Sir William Maxwell, in his presidential address, referred to Esperanto, and added how much the work of the Alliance would be facilitated by the adoption of one channel for the purpose of carrying one's ideas and thoughts at a meeting like this. Sir William knows what it means to preside at conferences where every word spoken in English must be translated into German and French, and *vice versa!* I have had occasion to mention that no less than 28 languages are in use in the countries represented in the League. A number of them (Gaelic, Romance, Basque, etc.) will scarcely claim to be heard in the Assembly. Suppose, therefore, there are 22 languages officially employed in the forty-eight States Members. Apply the formula $(22 \times 21)/2$ and we have 231 as the number of translations to be made if each Delegation were to speak but once in the Assembly! The absurdity of such a figure is an argument for the necessity of considering the question of an international language. If the time is still too soon for the Assembly to adopt it, as I believe it is, it certainly is late enough for an authoritative body entrusted by the League to make enquiries concerning it, with a view of meeting the demands of science and commerce, and the still higher need for an instrument for international understanding and co-operation which are the preliminary conditions of lasting peace. The League may well ask, without committing itself too deeply, "Is an international auxiliary language possible? If possible, how far is it practicable? If sufficiently practicable, is it advisable to encourage it? If so, what should the League do?"

A Nitobe si ispira la Associazione Nitobe (<http://www.nitobe.it>), fondata a Roma il 13 ottobre 2010, associazione senza fini di lucro che mira a sensibilizzare il mondo politico, imprenditoriale, accademico e in generale la società civile sui temi della democrazia linguistica e della giustizia linguistica, e più in generale dei diritti linguistici, componente fondamentale dei diritti umani. L'Associazione Nitobe ha pubblicato nel 2011 l'edizione in esperanto del libro di Aldo Capitini *Le tecniche della nonviolenza*, scritto nel 1967 ma ancora attuale. Su internet si può trovare anche il sito del Nitobe Centre for Language Democracy (<http://en.nitobe.info>).



Nitobe Inazo (1862-1933)

Aldo Capitini
Teknikoj de neperforto

Edonita targo de



Esperantigo de Nicolina Rossi
Presento de Marco Parnello, Francesco Pullio



Edistudio

Copertina del libro *Teknikoj de neperforto*

Ne ĉiam daŭras malbona vetero, ne ĉiam daŭras homa sufero [1605]: “Non per sempre dura la cattiva stagione, non per sempre dura la sofferenza dell’uomo”.