

Esperanto as an Auxiliary Language and a Possible Solution to the BRICS Language Dilemma: A Case Study

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Summary. Research demonstrates that there are over 6,000 languages in the world and countries believe that their national interest should come first, and in this case the national language(s) must be prioritized. However, it became imperative for people, let alone countries, to use a language they can understand for trade (economy) and socio-political or cultural relations. This raised a number of problems including the fact that colonial masters' language was upheld to the detriment of their once "slaves" language which they called a dialect. With the advent of democracy and improvement in international bilateral and multilateral relations, linguistic rights were recognized as part and parcel of other human rights, and subsequently, a win-win approach became reasonably what countries would expect in international co-operation. Today the reality is that English serves as a lingua franca in trade and co-operation but this is to some extent abusive to people's democratic and linguistic rights. The study is predominantly qualitative although a survey is also used to balance the findings. Further research is recommended in the future especially on the same or similar topics in any other BRICS country.

Keywords: BRICS; Esperanto; multilingualism; linguistic human rights; auxiliary language.

Introduction to Esperanto as an auxiliary language for BRICS

This article explores the value of Esperanto, a language created in 1887 by Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof for intended universal use (Universala Esperanto Asocio 2000: 3) and organizational adoption. As a language, Esperanto did not achieve its universal conquest in the sense of becoming a universal language per se, or not as yet, but at least the language became a fully recognized international means of communication. The paper evolved from an extract of a doctoral thesis which aimed at studying the effects of BRICS partnership on mineral beneficiation in South Africa. The BRICS as an organisation is concerned

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with language problems which a section of the above-mentioned exploration sought to address (Isheloke 2018a).

The paradigm shift between the lingua franca as inherited from the colonialists and the more democratic choice of the language that liberates everyone is presented as an experiment worth of try within the context of the BRICS. The study starts with the auxiliary characteristic of Esperanto, tackles the *raison d'être* of the BRICS, looking so closely into the problem of multilingualism, bilingualism and monolingualism and what they present as pros or cons to a healthy inter-country relation.

Esperanto explained

Esperanto means one who hopes (Müller, Benton 2006: 1). It was first a pseudonym used by its author and creator of what was a “mysterious language” then. Later on, thousands of Esperantists who learned as pioneers felt the name fit well what they think of the language as idealists. Esperanto has been there for over a century. The language is artificial and yet a living one. It developed into a language that has millions of speakers around the world (Isheloke 2015: 20).

Esperanto movement in Africa

In Africa, Esperanto is active in countries such as Togo, the DRC, Tanzania, Benin, Nigeria, Burundi and Kenya and many other countries. Specific to the nature of Esperanto is the ease of learning it than learning Mandarin, Afrikaans, IsiZulu, Russian, Tamil, Urdu, Hindi or English – the list is not exhaustive (Isheloke 2018c). In addition to this aspect, Esperanto carries the idea of international brotherhood. The speakers often demonstrate generosity and care and are more open to developing international friendship. It is said that what Zamenhof managed to do is to form a community of speakers of Esperanto which withstood the test of time. It is estimated that between four and 11 million people use Esperanto in the world, and the majority being in Europe and Asia (CII Radio 2018).

BRICS Language influence

The BRICS have numerous languages. In South Africa alone there are 11 official or national languages (12 if sign language is also counted in) and India comes second in number of dialects or spoken languages. In the case of Africa for example, the DRC, a SADC member country, has over 450 languages, none of which is the language of education (Isheloke 2009) as this privilege is reserved to French.

Russian did not have influence in the context of BRICS as a language, but apart from English, the new phenomenon is the embryonic rise of Mandarin in general. There are currently many Confucius Institutes across the globe, and China does not hesitate to fund initiatives to spread the influence of Mandarin (Isheloke 2018a; Isheloke 2018b; Isheloke 2018c).

In Africa for example, the African Union (AU) had a resolution to incorporate Swahili into the language curriculum of its African member states, but meaningless efforts if any have been noted in this regard. South Africa has reached an agreement with China to introduce Mandarin in schools (Isheloke 2018b).

The propaedeutic value of Esperanto

Studying Esperanto for one year and then French for three years results in greater proficiency in French than when studying French straightforward for four years. English would require seven years to master, French takes at least five years to learn properly but a year of learning should be enough for Esperanto mastery (Müller, Benton 2006). It is argued that Esperanto could be taught to prepare students to learn another foreign language effectively (Fisher 1931; Eaton 1934: 1–4).

Esperanto is a logical and easy to learn language

The dialogue below was tried out during the third interdisciplinary conference hosted by the Durban University of Technology in Durban and was very successful in presenting Esperanto as a living language.

Table 1. An Introduction to Esperanto

First dialogue	Esperanto	English
	Saluton	Hello
	Saluton	Hi
	Kiel vi fartas?	How are you?
	Mi fartas bone dankon kaj vi?	I am fine thanks and you?
	Kiu estas via nomo?	What is your name?
	Mia nomo estas Byelongo.	My name is Byelongo.
	Kaj vi?	And you?
	Mia nomo estas Rafeeq.	My name is Rafeeq.
	Bone, ke mi renkontis vin.	Nice to meet you.
	Ĝis la revido!	Good bye!

Table 1 shows an introductory Esperanto dialogue and provides its English translation. Where English uses two words for ‘hello’ and ‘hi’, Esperanto sparingly has the equivalent ‘saluton’. However, it is good that English provides ‘hello’ and ‘hi’ as equivalent greetings. Esperanto instead allows the economy of words while making it possible to relatively enjoy the same communicational benefits.

South Africa’s language dilemma

In South Africa, there are officially 11 languages with different influence to the socio-economic development of the speakers. Currently, against the politically correct rhetoric, English and Afrikaans still dominate the public-private professional activities (*Language* 2013).

Theory of risk, trust and uncertainty

Watson and Moran (2005) elaborate on risk, uncertainty and trust. The concept of trust, risk and uncertainty augur well with the reality; as the study addresses both the ambivalent characteristic of the theories and contextualizes them in an empirical manner. The theory could be applicable to both commercial and socio-cultural aspects for example during China-USA tariff war (Grossman, Horn 2012: 1–7, 60). For Esperanto to be embraced by the BRICS risk, trust and uncertainty are notions that will have to be addressed by both the Esperanto organisations and the BRICS member countries. This, however, is in no way an easy task to accomplish.

Coleman (N. d: 1–3) as well studies trust: “effective communication becomes imperative behind the partnership and their role within it”. Trust is needed and effective communication could enhance it. Nickel and Vaesen (2010) focus only on interpersonal trust and risk applicable also to the context of BRICS as argued in this study.

The place of Esperanto amid the BRICS partnership could be substantiated by the need to promote multilingualism in the world for organisations of the stature of the BRICS. In such a situation, a social welfare function as embraced in South Africa becomes an alternative (Grossman, Horn 2012: 11).

Jong-Wha (2013: 10) shows, for instance, that, as China is making reforms on various economic issues, there is no guarantee of success for the deleveraging and structural reform. Nickel and Vaesen (2012; Coleman 2008: 3; Watson, Moran 2005) agree that trust is needed for co-operation.

Esperanto-related synergies within the BRICS

The formation of profitable partnership is not unknown in the world. What is unique about the BRICS though is its influence in the making of the new economic order and balance of power in the world (Notshulwana 2012: 1–8; Vickers 2013: 673). The ability to communicate is essential to networking at a global, multilateral as well as bilateral levels.

The challenge of BRICS vis-à-vis Esperanto experiments

Geography-wise, BRICS with 25% of the world’s landmass is significantly larger than European Union (Van Agtmael 2012: 76–79). In terms of trade and co-operation however, the fact that all the countries of the EU zone are near each other facilitates transnational or international transactions hence a greater benefit to the population at large. Communication or the lack of a common language, however, still poses a difficulty in the EU just as it does for the BRICS in addition to the distance between states.

Intra-BRICS communication challenge and the language gap

It was generally acknowledged in this study that there is indeed a language gap. This is consistent with the views of Esperanto speaking intellectuals as communicated by one

of their leaders Dr Renato Corsetti in an email (Pers. comm. 9 September 2017). The following are attempts to remedy the above-mentioned language gap given by participants:

BRICS will have a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on joint BRICS website which was planned to be launched soon;
BRICS countries have a special way of communicating among them;
BRICS has many cultural agreements inter-BRICS including a language policy;
Unlike the BRIC, the South African government makes use of different languages for official duties (Interviewee no 1 and Interviewee no 5).

The language issue is not foreign to the mining sector. Slang and Fanakalo are some forms of communications used in the mining sector in addition to the national languages of South Africa (Greeff 2016). Effective communication could actually be useful to promote “Expertise exchange for miners’ protection in the sector” (Interviewee no 4). Participants were of the opinion that:

We should learn our (African) languages (instead);
Some people do not want to learn our African languages;
Learning each other’s languages is good;
We will learn Mandarin as part of the bigger effort; and
Language helps to know others better.

The participants were for example cognisant of the fact that both South Africa and India use English as a primary language of communication in official meetings. It was recognised that before South Africa could engage Russians, the services of interpreters (or translators) were required. Over 6,000 languages are classified in the world and the advantages of multilingualism outweigh the disadvantages (*Language* 2013). A neutral language should serve as a medium of communication for organisations or among people of different mother tongues (Despiney 2017) such as BRICS communities in order to bridge the language gap.

Mandarin versus other languages or communication tools

In general, it was noted that Mandarin is being promoted in South Africa (Interviewee no 5; Interviewee no 8). A few participants thought there was a need to diversify language usage (through a policy of multilingualism) in line with the constitution of this country.

Intellectuals’ contribution to BRICS project

BRICS academics and practitioners could exchange experience and propose ways to develop member countries technologically (*Advances* 2015). Duolingo and other programmes put Esperanto on par with technological advancement in the fourth industrial

revolution. For example, “Russia has a unique geopolitical position, sufficient military power, with significant technological, intellectual and ethical potential” (Shakhmurzova 2015). Research alludes to the academic debate that took place about not only the re-emergence of global south actors but also about the need to return to principles of a political economy of the 1970s. Esperanto for BRICS could be very well received by the people who want peace and economic development.

The Civil society and Esperanto in the BRICS countries

Esperanto, a language created in 1887 by Dr. Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof has since then become a living language taught in certain western universities, in the East and even in Africa (Isheloke 2018a; Isheloke 2018c). UNESCO resolutions would be a good example in favour of the use of Esperanto in bringing together different nations (Despiney 2017).

Experts demonstrate that interpretation and translation services are very costly, and it would be more cost-effective to use one shared language as a business lingua franca or opt for a multi-linguistic structure instead. This has proven to be almost impossible in most cases for international and global organisations, as often interpreters are ‘half-baked’, incompetent or outnumbered (Memmott 2013; Nicolson 2013).

Esperanto would not be a bad idea at an experimental level (Isheloke 2018a). However, Bock and Mheta (*Language* 2013: 351) state that it is important to address the issue of “language ideology” before sharing own belief about the ideal language policy.

Socio-cultural interactions and the language issue

In India they have a plethora of languages just as in South Africa with the 11 official languages (*Language* 2013). Lastly, China has made Mandarin its official language for ease of communication thus marginalising many varieties of dialects and languages of indigenous groups.

Esperanto can be the bridge joining the Western, the Eastern parts of the world in general (Ševčenko, Striganova 2016: 58) and the BRICS in particular. Roux (2016: 29) is of the opinion that: “All require knowledge of foreign languages to create a world-minded attitude... In addition, the author agrees that learning a language is hard work.”

Neologism may make language learning an ever-ending process, but CD and video tools can help a great deal in achieving some progress even for Esperanto initiatives. “To know more than one language will always stand one in good stead” (Azar-Luxton 2016: 1).

According to Derrick (2016: 24), “outsourcing become a very hotly debated topic in South Africa, which came to the fore following the protest action and “Fees Must Fall Campaign” at a number of our Universities”. Outsourcing can be practiced in field of language translation and interpretations, but at what cost?

Apart from the language and global warming as a challenge, good health is a prerequisite for socio-economic development in the BRICS countries (China Cures Ebola Patients 2015: 7; Reuters 2016: 5).

Cutting edge technology and BRICS

Amongst the other information, environmental protection tools could be shared between BRICS member countries using Esperanto. As far as South Africa is concerned, more than five million users are active on social media (Ramnarain, Govender 2013: 1885–1897). The average person spends an hour a day on Facebook in this country.

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A neutral language should serve as a medium of communication among people of different mother tongues (Despiney 2017) such as the BRICS.

Communication challenges

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BRIC’s interventions in South Africa

A total of 37.5% of the respondents did not answer the question on the construct above, and none alluded to Esperanto as a possible solution to the language dilemma.

BRICS implication in South Africa

Notably, a respondent expressed the view according to which the BRICS as a partnership can be a dangerous platform for a country like South Africa, especially in the long run. However, 75% respondents emphasized the importance of the BRICS if the countries manage to organize themselves.

An important aspect of the BRICS partnership was said to be the fact that: “BRICS doesn’t see itself as five countries; it sees itself as a part to its continent” (sic) (Interviewee no 4). It is in this perspective that one needs to understand why in 2013: “We held one summit in Durban and invited African leaders. That summit was thus called the outreach retreat for African leaders” (5th BRICS summit 2013).

It was found that further interactions take place among the BRICS (and other global organisations), and these can be competitive to both. This is consistent with the opinion of FP Staff (2017). BRICS meetings are of a variety of nature (PTI 2017) as found above, and run by consensus. China supports negotiations and regular meetings (*China’s Military Strategy* 2015: 11). Generally, 50% of the participants expressed reservation when it comes to BRICS partnership’s impact on South Africa. The following statements represent a negative perception of BRICS by a few participants:

I think in the long run it (BRICS) is dangerous;
Chinese investments may cause problems;
BRICS investment looks good for the time being; and
Our mineral resources and assets are being exploited (Interviewee no 7).

The literature covered the question of mineral trade extensively (*The beneficiation strategy* 2015: 9–10; Isheloke 2018; Ranzau 2009). Common issues that emerged are discussed below.

Common issues from the quantitative and qualitative data

A number of discoveries matched the findings obtained under the survey (questionnaire) and the interviews. Hereafter, the matching findings are grouped in categories before discussion.

The significance of the SABRICMB model

The model promotes mineral beneficiation in South Africa while calling for more research and experiments. Esperanto experiment could be understood in this regard. The model however leans towards mineral beneficiation hence not included in this a language article.

Research methods

Mixed-methods were used in this study to harness the benefits of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Qualitative methods are useful to collect an opinion while quantitative methods measure the proportion of a population who reasons or behaves in a specific way (Keegan 2009: 11). Whereas qualitative methods study phenomena in their natural settings to understand their meaning or to provide a sound interpretation (Barbour 2008; Flick 2007), quantitative methods emphasise the use of questionnaire that enable statistical analysis (Erikson, Kovalainen 2008: 141–155). Mixed methods present a number of advantages which allow the information to be sourced differently (Gibbert et al. 2008: 1465–1474).

Table 2. The research process

Exploration process	Actions	Results
Phase 1	Initial review of literature and observation of phenomena	First contact with experts. Redefining the topic
Phase 2	Survey and semi-structured interviews	First hand data-turned information
Phase 3	Complementary review and data analysis	Data analysis, synthesis, interview transcriptions and write up

Table 2 is a tabular representation of the research process in three phases. The table indicates the research instruments which were used and the outcome. It is better to set “Key Action Plans” to implement the beneficiation strategy successfully (*The beneficiation strategy* 2015: 11) and effective communication.

Table 3. Similar organisations took part in the survey on BRICS

First group	Second group	Third group
3 Associations	14 Base minerals	20 Coal
3 Diamonds	7 Gold	3 Investments
7 Mining contractors	3 Mining corporates	11 Platinum

Table 3 above does not constitute the participants as currently the Chamber of Mines could have more members and participants are kept anonymous (Chamber of Mines 2018). There were 69 targeted companies at the time of research for the quantitative aspect of the study and 10 targeted executives (including BRICS directorates) for the qualitative study.

Conclusion and recommendations

This paper discussed Esperanto as an auxiliary language and a possible solution to the BRICS language problem as a case study. South Africa should therefore as it is argued here:

Experiment with Esperanto for a more democratic communication system between countries, and to avoid linguistic colonisation; and

Allocate more resources on BRICS economic initiatives including Esperanto teaching and learning in the long run.

More investment in means of communication should be the way to go. South Africa should discourage xenophobia at all cost by educating the perpetrators and bringing them to task, and in general, also educating the previously disadvantaged population (Skinner 2015; *Mean streets migration* 2017; The Conversation Africa 2015). Esperanto could allow a more effective fight against xenophobia as it brings people closer using the ‘neutral’ common language.

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