

Otto Jespersen: Collected English Writings

An International Language

Otto Jespersen



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COLLECTED ENGLISH WRITINGS

AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE

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PART I

GENERAL

INTRODUCTION

THIS book is to be a plea for an artificial international auxiliary language, and it will be well at the outset to see what is implied in these adjectives. *Artificial*, i.e. made consciously by one man or a group of men, in contradistinction to such natural languages as English, French, etc., which have been spoken for generations and whose development has chiefly taken place without the individuals being conscious of any changes. But the term "artificial" is apt to create a prejudice against the language we are to deal with, and it will be my business in this book to show how very "natural" such a language may be; I shall therefore prefer to speak of a *constructed* language, and instead of terming the existing languages natural I shall use the more appropriate term *national* languages.

The next adjective was *international*. That is to say that the language is meant to be used not by any one nation or in any one country, but by individuals who though belonging to different nationalities have something they want to communicate to one another.

Third: *auxiliary*. This implies that our international language is meant to be only a sort of substitute for national languages whenever these are not capable of serving as means of communication. It is not intended that a new language should supplant the existing languages: no one in his sober senses would think it possible to make all nations forget their own languages and agree on one single substitute for all purposes. But what a great many sensible men and women in many countries

do think worth working for, is a state of things in which an educated Englishman when meeting an educated Spaniard or Dutchman or Bulgarian would be pretty certain to be understood if he addressed him in a constructed language adopted for that purpose—a state of things also in which international conferences and congresses on political or scientific or commercial questions would be carried on freely without need of interpreters, and all official documents relating to more than one state would be circulated in a single language.

What then we interlinguists are thinking of, is not what Schleyer made the boasting motto of his Volapük, “Menade bal, püki bal” (To one human race, one language), but rather what another inventor of an artificial language, Bollack, took as his motto: The second language to everybody. The new interlanguage would not infringe the sacred rights of the mother-tongue, but be used only when two or more persons ignorant of one another’s language had occasion to talk or to write to one another.¹

NEED FOR AN INTERLANGUAGE.

An American may travel from Boston to San Francisco without hearing more than one language. But if he were to traverse the same distance on this side of the Atlantic, he would have a totally different story to tell. Suppose he started from Oslo and journeyed to the South or South-East: he would then hear perhaps Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, German, Czecho-Slovakian, Hungarian, Rumanian, Bulgarian, Turkish, Greek, and then in Egypt Arabic and a little English—twelve different languages,

¹ In this book I often use the abbreviation I.A.L. for International Auxiliary Language, also sometimes I.L.

of which the majority would be utterly unintelligible to him. And yet he would not have heard half of the languages spoken in Europe. The curse of Babel is still with us. How many people have been in situations where they have felt the barriers of language a serious drawback, where they have been desirous to communicate freely with someone, ask questions, obtain or impart information, etc., which has been rendered impossible by their own and the other party's want of sufficient linguistic knowledge! It is not very pleasant to be engaged in a discussion that interests you, if you feel that while you have the best arguments the other man has the whip hand of you, because the conversation is in *his* native language, in which you are able to express only what you can, while he can say everything he wants to. In scientific congresses, as Professor Pfaundler says, "only very few can take part in the discussions, and many must be well content if they are able to understand the usually rapidly delivered papers. Many an important criticism is not made because one does not possess the ability to discuss a question in a foreign language, and does not wish to expose oneself to the chance of a rebuff, caused not so much by ignorance of the matter in hand as by want of facility in expression. Every member of a congress has noticed that whenever the language employed in the papers changes, a considerable number of the audience leave with more or less noise, in order to avoid being compelled to listen to a paper which they do not understand."

Sometimes in international discussions the three chief languages are allowed, and each separate speech has to be translated into the two others. I was present at such a congress in Copenhagen in 1910 and saw how intolerable this dragging repetition must necessarily be,

not least to those who like myself understood English, French and German with perfect ease: anything like a real vivid discussion was excluded by the inevitable delays—not to mention the inadequacy of many of the extempore translations.

With regard to printed works matters are somewhat better, but not quite satisfactory. Most scientific men are nowadays able to read books and papers on their own special subject in the three chief languages, English, German and French; but that is no longer sufficient. One of the most important features of the last hundred years is the nationality-movement, in politics, in literature, in art, in everything. Even small nations want to assert themselves and fly their own colours on every occasion, by way of showing their independence of their mightier neighbours. The growing improvement in higher education everywhere has fortunately made it possible to print books on scientific matters even in languages spoken by comparatively small nations. But what is a benefit to these countries themselves, may in some cases be detrimental to the world at large, and even to authors, in so far as thoughts that deserved diffusion all over the globe are now made accessible merely to a small fraction of those that should be interested in them. In my own field, I have had occasion to see the way in which excellent work written in Danish which might have exerted a deep influence on contemporary linguistic thought has remained practically unknown outside of Scandinavia. (See my book *Language* under Rask and Bredsdorff; I might have mentioned Westergaard and Thomsen as well.) The late secretary of the Berlin Academy, the eminent classical scholar H. Diels, says: "Incalculable are the intellectual losses incurred every year in consequence of the national hobby of small, but highly gifted and

scientifically active peoples who insist that scientific works (which cannot all of them be translated) should appear in their own, narrowly circumscribed languages." For my own part, though I have spent most of my life studying different languages, I have sometimes been obliged to lay aside as unread books and papers which I should have liked very much to study, but which happened to be written in a tongue with which I was not sufficiently familiar.

IGNORANCE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES.

Kant was first made known to Edinburgh in 1803 not in the German original, but through a French translation. John Stuart Mill was able, though with difficulty, to read German, but preferred reading translations, and never learnt to shift for himself in a German railway station. When Carlyle met Louis Blanc, "it was the veriest fun to watch their conversation. Carlyle's French was a literal translation of his own untranslatable English, uttered too in his own broad Scotch. Louis Blanc could not at all understand him, but would listen attentively, and then answer very wide of the mark." (Car. Fox.) Faraday knew no German, and consequently Robert Mayer's and Helmholtz's investigations were a "sealed book" to him. "How different," said Dean Stanley, "might have been the case of the Church of England if Newman had been able to read German." When a German scholar sent an annotated edition of *Macbeth* to Dr. Furnivall, the director of the New Shakespeare Society, the Early English Text Society, etc., the latter wrote back to regret that he could not read the notes, but that he saw from the figures that the author had gone into metrical questions. When Zola fled from

France during the Dreyfus troubles, he was utterly unable to make himself understood in English. And the same was the case with the Danish poet Herman Bang, who died miserably in America in 1912 unable to make his simplest wants understood by those about him.

Nor is a similar inability unknown among statesmen. It is said that it was injurious to Denmark in her difficult political situation in the middle of the last century, that Madvig (the great Latin scholar) and other ministers spoke French with difficulty and felt shy of talking bad French to the foreign ambassadors. Similar things are reported from the World War. Sir Edward Grey could not speak French, and the French ambassador, Cambon, spoke bad English. None of the French or English generals, with the exception of Lord Kitchener, spoke the other nation's language at all well, and at the Peace Conference Clemenceau gained an undue ascendancy because he was practically the only one who had complete command of both languages. It requires no unusual amount of wisdom to understand that confidential talks between mighty statesmen of different nationalities on topics of world-wide importance lose a great deal if they have to be carried on by means of interpreters: how much better if the mighty of this earth were able to meet on an equal footing linguistically speaking—but that could only be possible by means of a perfectly neutral language.

It is true that we have translators and interpreters, but good and efficient translators are neither plentiful nor very cheap. I take from Miss Pankhurst's book the bit of information that during 1926 the Geneva staff of the League of Nations included 29 translators and interpreters at salaries amounting to £19,800—besides shorthand writers and typists. And then, the League is

only a modest beginning of that vast political organization of the whole world which has to come in a not too distant future!

In these days of cheap travel, of commercial interchange between all parts of the world, of airplanes and broadcasting, of international science and of world-politics, it seems an urgent need for merchants, technical men, scientists, literary men, politicians, in fact for everybody, to have an easy means of getting into touch with foreigners and of learning more from them than is possible by visiting other countries as tongue-tied tourists. The word "international" was only invented by Jeremy Bentham in 1780—nowadays we have come to the point of needing an international language.

Let me mention here also the recent invention of the speaking film, which is now being brought to a rare technical perfection. When Axel Petersen and Arnold Poulsen's "phono-film" was shown to a small audience in Copenhagen, my thought leapt out to the time when by this means it would be possible to have plays and speeches made visible and audible and comprehensible all over the world—the advantages of cinema and radio combined and made still more useful by means of an Interlanguage!

AN EXISTING LANGUAGE?

A great many people will stop here and say: yes, we grant that it would be desirable to have one single language used everywhere, but would it not be best to select one of the existing languages and use that in all communications between two or more nations, even if no one of those concerned knew that language as his own mother-tongue? The answer is that a deliberate

choice of any one language for such a purpose would meet with unsurmountable difficulties on account of international jealousies. Frenchmen and Germans alike would fight tooth and nail against a proposal to make English a universally recognized international language, Frenchmen and Englishmen against German, etc.—and quite naturally too, for such a choice would mean an enormous handicapping of all other nations. Nor would it be possible to make all nations agree on the selection of the language of a smaller nation: visionaries have, as a matter of fact, proposed Norwegian and Armenian! It would require a good deal of compulsion to make people all over the world take up the study of either of these languages, and to the nation thus put in the linguistically most-favoured position it would be a doubtful boon to see its beloved tongue mutilated and trampled under foot everywhere, as would inevitably be the result.

One day, when I was discussing these matters with a famous Belgian historian and complaining of the difficulty felt by men of science who happened to be born in a small country, he said: Instead of writing in an artificial language, it will be much better for you Danes to write in French; if the matter is good enough, we shall read it with pleasure, even if it be bad French. I replied that no one can help being to some extent irritated to read his own language disfigured by faults in grammar and phraseology, and that a Dane would find it much easier to learn to write Ido (or now Novial) perfectly than to learn to write even very faulty French; he would be spared that unpleasant feeling of inferiority which he must always have when trying to write a serious book or paper in a foreign national language.

LATIN?

Latin was for centuries the international tongue of the higher intellectual world, and it is still used extensively in the Roman Catholic Church: why not then revive it for all purposes? It would certainly have the advantage of being neutral and thus avoid the objections just mentioned. To those few scholars who dream of this rôle for Latin the reply is obvious: Latin has had that position, and has lost it irrevocably in consequence of the natural development of the last three centuries or more. Even classical scholars use Latin very little nowadays in their scientific papers. And outside their narrow circles very few people are now able to read, still less to speak or write, Latin in spite of the great number of hours devoted to that language in many schools. How many scientists would now be able to read Newton's or Tycho Brahe's works in the original? And how many are there who read even such excellent works as Erasmus's *Encomium Moriae* or Holberg's *Nicolaus Klimius* in Latin? When it comes to expressing the ideas of our own day, the deficiencies of classical Latin appear with ruthless clarity: telephones and motor-cars and wireless have no room in Ciceronian Latin, and it will be of little use to coin Neolatin words for these and other modern inventions, for the whole structure of the language with its intricate forms and complex syntax, which tempts the writer to twisted sentences, has become so utterly antiquated that we of the twentieth century wince at the idea of having to clothe our thoughts in that garb.

Recently G. de Reynold in two remarkable articles (in the *Revue de Genève*, May and June 1925)—after a scathing criticism of the barbarisms of Esperanto and

after a condemnation of the idea of an artificial language, which in my view is exaggerated and unjust—brought forward the proposal to use as an international language not classical Latin, but the Latin of the Middle Ages, with its simplified sentence constructions (*quod* instead of infinite clauses, etc.) and even further modernizations: he thinks it will be easy for a conference of philologists and experts of all countries to agree on a system for adapting Latin forms and phraseology to contemporary uses. This is to my mind much more Utopian than such a scheme as that advocated below: for where is such a conference to begin, and where to end? Irregular verbs? I think most lovers of Latin will object to a simplification of *sum*, *es*, *est*, and where are we to draw the line in the use of the subjunctive and the ablative, etc. etc.? Further as to the meanings and uses of words: is *bellum classium* to mean naval warfare or war of the classes in the modern sense? *Redactio*, *sociologia*, *eventualitas*, *fixatio*, *realismus*, *radicalismus*, *jurista*, *vegetarianus* and similar coinages would, of course, have to be admitted in spite of the protests of classicists, but what is to be done with *radium* and *radio*, not as case forms of *radius*, but as independent words? Hundreds of similar questions would inevitably arise, and the conference would probably split up into small groups representing the most diverging stand-points—some advocating the Latin of the Vulgate, others that of Erasmus, while some would simplify inflexions in a few points and others in a great many more, even down to partisans of Peano's *Latino sine flexione*, which in the eyes of not a few scholars is a barbarous profanation of the Latin they love, and which is evidently very far from de Reynold's idea. Even after a repeated reading of his eloquent plea I cannot help looking on Latin as irretrievably dead, at any rate for

our purposes, which should cover the interests not only of scholars, but also of merchants, technicians, politicians and other men of the practical world. It is no use saying that Latin culture and through it the Latin language has pervaded and is pervading modern life in thousands of ways: no one denies that, and therefore great parts of the Latin language must necessarily be incorporated in our Interlanguage of the future—but only those parts which have proved their vitality by surviving in the languages actually now spoken—that is the test of what we can use and what not.

The decisive reason, however, why we must oppose the adoption of one of the existing languages, living or dead, is that each of them is several times more difficult than a constructed language need be and than those constructed languages are already which have any chance of being selected; while in Part II I shall try to show that it is possible in some respects to go further in simplification than most of the proposed artificial languages have gone. It will now be our task to consider those objections which are constantly raised against the idea of a constructed language and to show that they are far from being conclusive.

OBJECTIONS TO CONSTRUCTED LANGUAGES.

Objections are raised both by professional philologists (linguists) and by laymen. Among the former I must here specially mention the two leaders of German comparative linguistics, Brugmann and Leskien, but their attacks were made at the time when Esperanto was beginning to gain favour, and later languages have avoided not a few of the imperfections found fault with

by the two Leipzig professors. In 1925 Professor G. Güntert in his *Grundfragen der Sprachwissenschaft* tried to reduce the whole idea *ad absurdum*, but on the basis of so deficient a knowledge of the facts of the case and with so prejudiced a mind that he proved less than nothing. It would be a very great mistake to suppose that professional philologists as a body are against constructed languages; it would be much more correct to say that those among them who have gone most into the question are the best disposed to them. I may mention here among those who have spoken in favour of the idea *in abstracto*, Schuchardt, Vilh. Thomsen and Meillet—three of the greatest stars in the philological world—and among those who have actually taken part in the International Language Movement, Baudouin de Courtenay, Ernst Kock, Wallensköld, Collinson and Sapir, all of them university professors.

People who hear about constructed languages will often say that such a language must be as lifeless as a dead herring, and that we may just as well think of setting up an homunculus made in a chemical retort and claiming for it the qualities of a living human being. Languages are not organisms, and their "life" is not to be compared with that of animals or plants. Forty years ago Schuchardt was able to make short work of this objection by showing how much in the so-called natural languages was really artificial, that is, due to conscious endeavours and conscious selection, and yet was just as capable of "living" as anything else. What we have to do is to study existing languages and their history so as to find out the actual laws of their development and then build on what has most vitality.

DIFFERENCES IN AN INTERLANGUAGE.

A further objection is this: such a language can never be exactly alike in the mouths of all who use it; there will always be a good many divergencies and differences. But could not the same thing be said of any existing language? English is spoken in many ways, differing according to localities and to classes and sets of people. What is essential in one as well as in the other case is that there should be so much practical agreement that mutual understanding is possible—and as a matter of fact that has been attained in the case of more than one constructed language.

“An Englishman and a Frenchman will never be able to pronounce the same words in the same way.” In this form the statement is not exact: modern practical language-teaching on the basis of phonetics has shown possibilities in this direction which former times could not suspect; but further, phonetic schooling and training is needed to a far less extent in the case of a constructed language than when it is a question of teaching a foreign national language, with its many fine nuances which it is necessary to know and to observe if one wants to have a good pronunciation, and on which we must therefore at present insist in our schools. The phonetic system of a constructed language should be very simple indeed—and is so in the case of all recent schemes. Volapük had German *ü* and *ö*, which are easy enough for a Frenchman and a Scandinavian, but not for an Englishman, a Spaniard or a Russian, though a few hours' training after a phonetic explanation will suffice to enable anyone to pronounce these sounds; but Esperanto and several other constructed languages have shown how easy it is to dispense with

these vowels so as to have only the five vowels *a, e, i, o, u* (pronounced in the continental way): sounds which no nation finds difficult. Similarly with consonants: if the language is really constructed on a sensible plan, a sufficient degree of phonetic agreement can easily be obtained even among people who start from such different sound-systems as French and English. It must be remembered that the fewer the distinctive sounds (the "phonemes") which one has in a language, the wider the margin of correctness which can be allowed to each sound without its infringing on the domain of its neighbour, and thus running the risk of a word being misheard for another.

But we need not linger over theoretical considerations: the practical experiences of Volapükists, Esperantists and Idists in their congresses and informal meetings have shown every participant that the fears of sceptics are groundless with regard to pronunciation. "*Ab esse ad posse valet consequentia*": when one has actually seen a thing, one cannot any longer doubt that it is possible. As for myself, I was present at a meeting of the Philological Society of London in 1887, at a time when I was an utter disbeliever in artificial languages, and there I heard an Englishman and a German speaking Volapük and understanding one another perfectly in that curious tongue. Later I have heard Esperanto and Ido spoken by people of a great many nationalities and have been able as a phonetician to observe the ease with which they were able to converse with one another on various topics. It should also be remembered that as an interlanguage is chiefly spoken when men or women from different countries meet, they will naturally tend to rub off the peculiarities of their national pronunciations. This was the experience related by a French Idist after a visit to English

Idists: "During the first sentences there was an appreciable difference between our pronunciations; but gradually and pretty rapidly, on account of the very necessity of making ourselves understood, each of us adapted himself to the other, my English host giving a clearer enunciation to all syllables, and myself paying more attention to stress than when I am talking Ido with my countrymen. After some moments, we struck, as it were, the same middle note" (*Progreso*, 4.429). I am perfectly sure that a similar mutual adaptation has taken place very often, and will take place again whenever interlinguists meet together from various countries with the sincere wish of getting full benefit from the conversation. The more such a language is spoken at international gatherings, the more will everybody's pronunciation quite naturally approach the ideal average.

It will further be said that there are difficulties arising from the form-system of any constructed language, which people with different morphologies in their own language will not be able to overcome. If the interlanguage distinguishes four cases, as Volapük did on account of the idiosyncrasies of its German inventor, Englishmen will constantly stumble at these rules. Quite so; therefore recent schemes avoid such complications. Nothing can be concluded from imperfect schemes, except just this, that we must make the interlanguage of the future more perfect, i.e. simpler. Volapük made the error of having four cases; Esperanto made a similar, though lesser, mistake with its compulsory accusative, used not only for the direct object, but also without preposition to indicate the place to (or towards) which. The simpler the morphological structure is, the less inducement will there be to make grammatical mistakes from a recollection of the grammatical rules of one's

native language. But that simplicity does not mean that the language we construct is to be a kind of "Pidgin" incapable of expressing nuances of thought which are necessary to highly cultivated Europeans. I have devoted a long chapter of my book *Language* to a study of Pidgin English, Beach-la-Mar and similar exotic minimum-languages or makeshift-languages, so I speak with some knowledge of the matter when I say that the interlanguage I am advocating in this book is totally different from such languages through being expressive and efficient, though extremely simple in its grammatical structure.

The following objection is found in various forms even in quite recent articles, and it cannot be denied that it carries a certain weight. Everybody will necessarily transfer some of his speech-habits to the international language, which will thus be coloured differently—in word order, phraseology, etc.—according to the native language underlying each user's way of thinking. There is, however, not so much in that objection as one might imagine beforehand, and here, too, we have already a good deal of experience gathered through practical work with various interlanguages. As a matter of fact a great many people have learnt how to express their thoughts in a constructed language in such a fashion as to be easily understood by people starting from very different national languages. Personally I have read articles and received letters, chiefly in Ido, but also in Esperanto and Occidental, written from not a few countries, Russia, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Hungary, etc., and expressed so accurately that I could hardly detect a single trace of the writers' nationality, though I do not deny that some correspondents lacked this power of effacing their mother-tongue. Some Russians will feel inclined to use *sua* instead of *mea*, when the subject of the sentence is "me,"

etc. No language, not even a simple interlanguage, can be learnt without some instruction, either through the mouth of a teacher, or through a book, or through both; and it must be the chief and foremost task of an instructor to warn his pupils against those idiomatic turns and expressions which cannot be easily understood abroad. It requires very little linguistic knowledge on the part of an Englishman to understand that he should avoid translating phrases like "put up with," "how do you do?" "go in for," etc., word for word into any foreign language. "Take place" means something different from "platz nehmen." During the war a German paper was indignant and took it as a sign of the cruelty of English girls that one had written to her "young man" the following threat: "I will cut you dead unless you enlist at once"; the German translated: "Ich will dich zerhacken," and took it literally!

The all-important rule in dealing with an interlanguage must always be not to translate word for word from one's native language, but to render the thought itself in its simplest form. This of course requires some mental discipline and amounts to saying that a constructed language cannot be expected to fulfil all the functions and uses to which a national language can be put. It must necessarily remain an intellectual language, a language for the brain, not for the heart; it can never expect to give expression to those deep emotions which find their natural outlet through a national language. There will always be something dry and prosaic about it, and it is a mistake to try to translate very deep poetry in it, for it will be capable of rendering only those elements of poetry which might as well have been expressed through a paraphrase in native prose. But all this does not hinder a constructed language from being eminently

useful in very many practical affairs of the utmost importance. This leads us to the following consideration.

NOT SO GOOD AS EXISTING LANGUAGES.

An objection¹ which is often raised against constructed languages is that they can never be as good as natural languages. It is true that our interlanguage is not as rich as English, not as elegant as French, not as vigorous as German, not as beautiful as Italian, not as full of nuances as Russian, not as "homelike" as our mother-tongue. But note this well, that all these good qualities, which one appreciates and praises in the national languages, are found only when they are spoken or written by natives. And the Interlanguage may very easily be richer than the English spoken by a Frenchman, more elegant than French as spoken by a Dane, more vigorous than the German of some Italians, more beautiful than the Italian of the English, more full of nuances than the Russian of Germans, and more homelike than my own tongue spoken by Russians. And as our language is an auxiliary language, it can only be compared fairly with natural languages as usually spoken by foreigners; and then neither Ido nor Novial need feel ashamed of itself.

FUTURE DIFFERENTIATIONS.

From linguists (philologists) and others one very often hears the following objection: even if all inhabitants of the earth learnt one and the same language, the unity would soon disappear, and different languages would

¹ This and the following paragraphs are a translation of the Novial text found below among Specimens.

arise in the same way as the Romanic languages were produced by the splitting up of Latin.

Against this objection I have two critical remarks: in the first place, the argument from linguistic history is not sound; and secondly, if it were, that should not hinder us from working for an international language.

It is quite true that the history of languages often shows us a tendency to differentiation: it is well known that most European languages have taken their origin from one and the same language. But the tendency towards differentiation is in no way inevitable. Those who believe that a language must everywhere and always break up into a number of dialects forget the most important law of linguistic biology, namely that constant intercourse creates linguistic unity, even where it did not exist, and that discontinuance of intercourse produces linguistic differences where there was once unity. If after the colonization of Iceland the Icelandic tongue came to be different from Norwegian, this was due to the cessation of constant communication, and if nowadays the speech of California is in perfect agreement in all essential points with that of Boston, this is due to the fact that the inhabitants of the western and eastern parts of America are in very active intercourse with one another. Antiquity witnessed many cases of differentiation of languages; we nowadays see more of the reverse process—dialects are everywhere disappearing, and unity is constantly increasing: an ever-growing number of people speaking the great national unity-languages. Thus the only condition under which an international language once adopted would split up into different languages, would be the want of constant intercourse; if for example a colony of Novialists (or Esperantists) emigrated to a previously uninhabited island, and lived

there entirely isolated from the rest of the world. But such a supposition is evidently absurd, and we must insist that as long as an interlanguage continues to be used in its true function as an aid to intercourse between different countries, there is no danger that it will suffer the fate that befell Latin, when that language was split up into the Romanic languages.

Even if we admit for a moment the possibility and probability of such a differentiation, this ought not to deter us from working for an international language and speaking it. Those who think that any language must by a natural law necessarily and fatally differentiate, will nevertheless speak their mother-tongue every day without being afraid that in accordance with that fatal law it will split up under their hands. And this is quite natural, for such a differentiation is not a matter of a moment; it will take some time, even a long time, and we may confidently assert that it will not take place during our lives. We can thus say: After us the deluge! But, as I have already said, I do not believe that even after us the dreaded linguistic deluge will take place.

NUMBER OF PROPOSED LANGUAGES.

A criticism which is much more serious in its consequences is this: people will never agree on one single artificial language to be used everywhere. A great many interlanguages have been proposed, and new ones spring up on all sides. One of these may be just as good as another, and if some have had a certain vogue and have gathered a troop of adherents, this success has in each case been only temporary, so that each new scheme must be prepared to share the fate of Volapük, which

had its heyday of triumph forty years ago and is now totally forgotten.

This objection would certainly be decisive, if the construction of an interlanguage were entirely arbitrary and dependent on an inventor's fancy, and if, on the other hand, the choice between various schemes depended exclusively on the public's whimsical preferences. But fortunately neither of these premises is correct, as we shall see when we cast a glance at the history of the international language movement, and more particularly at its most recent phases.