

The Universal Language: What, How and When?

Nozomu Sonda

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Outline

Introduction

Whither the universal language?

Necessity of a universal language

Choose from existing or created languages

Who will adopt one?

First as an auxiliary language and then as the universal language

Conclusion

Baha'u'llah's Vision

- O members of parliaments throughout the world! Select ye a single language for the use of all on earth, and adopt ye likewise a common script. God, verily, maketh plain for you that which shall profit you and enable you to be independent of others. He, of a truth, is the Most Bountiful, the All-Knowing, the All-Informed. This will be the cause of unity, could ye but comprehend it, and the greatest instrument for promoting harmony and civilization, would that ye might understand! We have appointed two signs for the coming of age of the human race: the first, which is the most firm foundation, We have set down in other of Our Tablets, while the second hath been revealed in this wondrous Book. (Kitab-i-Aqdas, paragraph #189)

The Necessity of a Universal Language (1)

- Among the things which are conducive to unity and concord and will cause the whole earth to be regarded as one country is that the divers languages be reduced to one language and in like manner the scripts used in the world be confined to a single script. It is incumbent upon all nations to appoint some men of understanding and erudition to convene a gathering and through joint consultation choose one language from among the varied existing languages, or create a new one, to be taught to the children in all the schools of the world.
- The day is approaching when all the peoples of the world will have adopted one universal language and one common script. When this is achieved, to whatsoever city a man may journey, it shall be as if he were entering his own home. These things are obligatory and absolutely essential. It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action. (*Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, pp.165-166)

The Necessity of a Universal Language (2)

- There are between 3,000 (as a low estimate) and 10,000 (as a high estimate) languages in the world.
- Learning a few languages can be very challenging.
- Time, energy and other resources needed for translation and interpretation are prohibitive.
- Translation/interpretation cannot always convey messages accurately.
- India has dozens of regional languages. There are several dialects in Chinese. Canada is divided into two language regions (French and English).
- The number of languages in the world: Only 3 (1%) students indicated 100 or less, 43 (17%) indicated “101-500,” 50 (20%) indicated 510-1,000, 35 (14%) indicated 1,001-2,000, 25 (10%) indicated 2,001 – 3,000, 18 (7%) indicated 3,001-5,000, 30 (12%) indicated 5,001 –10,000, and 48 (19%) indicated over 10,000. According to Crystal (1994), most of linguists estimate the number of languages in the world to be between 3,000 and 10,000, and 153 if underestimated it. Thus, 50 (20%) students were correct and 48 (19%) overestimated it.

The Necessity of a Universal Language (3)

- “The European Commission building in Brussels. Nowhere does the foreign language barrier exist so markedly as in the offices of the European Union. In 1994, the Joint Interpreting and Conference Service in Brussels, which serves many agencies and institutions of the EU, was providing 120,000 interpreter days (at a cost of 70 million ecu), and with 400 full-time staff and about 300 free-lancers had become the largest interpreting service in the world. From 1995 the task increased again, with member states using 11 official languages in their work, and presenting a translation problem involving a theoretical 110 language pairs. In the 9-language days of the early 1990’s, the EU institutions were already translating over 3 million words a day.” (David Crystal, 1997, Encyclopedia of Language; description of the language confusion at the European Union as the “EU Babel”)

The Necessity of a Universal Language (4)

- In Japan, English is one of the fundamental skills required for all students and workers in many fields. Former/late Prime Minister Obuchi's proposal to adopt English as an official second language of Japan was the first case voluntary adoption of any foreign language as an official language.

What Language? (1)

- In former Epistles We have enjoined upon the Trustees of the House of Justice *either to choose one language from among those now existing or to adopt a new one*, and in like manner to select a common script, both of which should be taught in all the schools of the world. Thus will the earth be regarded as one country and one home. (*Tablets of Baha'ullah*, pp.127-128)
- It is incumbent upon all nations to appoint some men of understanding and erudition to convene a gathering and through joint consultation *choose one language from among the varied existing languages, or create a new one*, to be taught to the children in all the schools of the world. (*Tablets of Baha'ullah*, pp.165-166)
(*italics added*)

What Language? (2)

• Existing Languages

- English
- Latin (dead)
- Chinese
- Greek
- Arabic
- Spanish
- Russian
- French
- German
- Japanese
- Persian

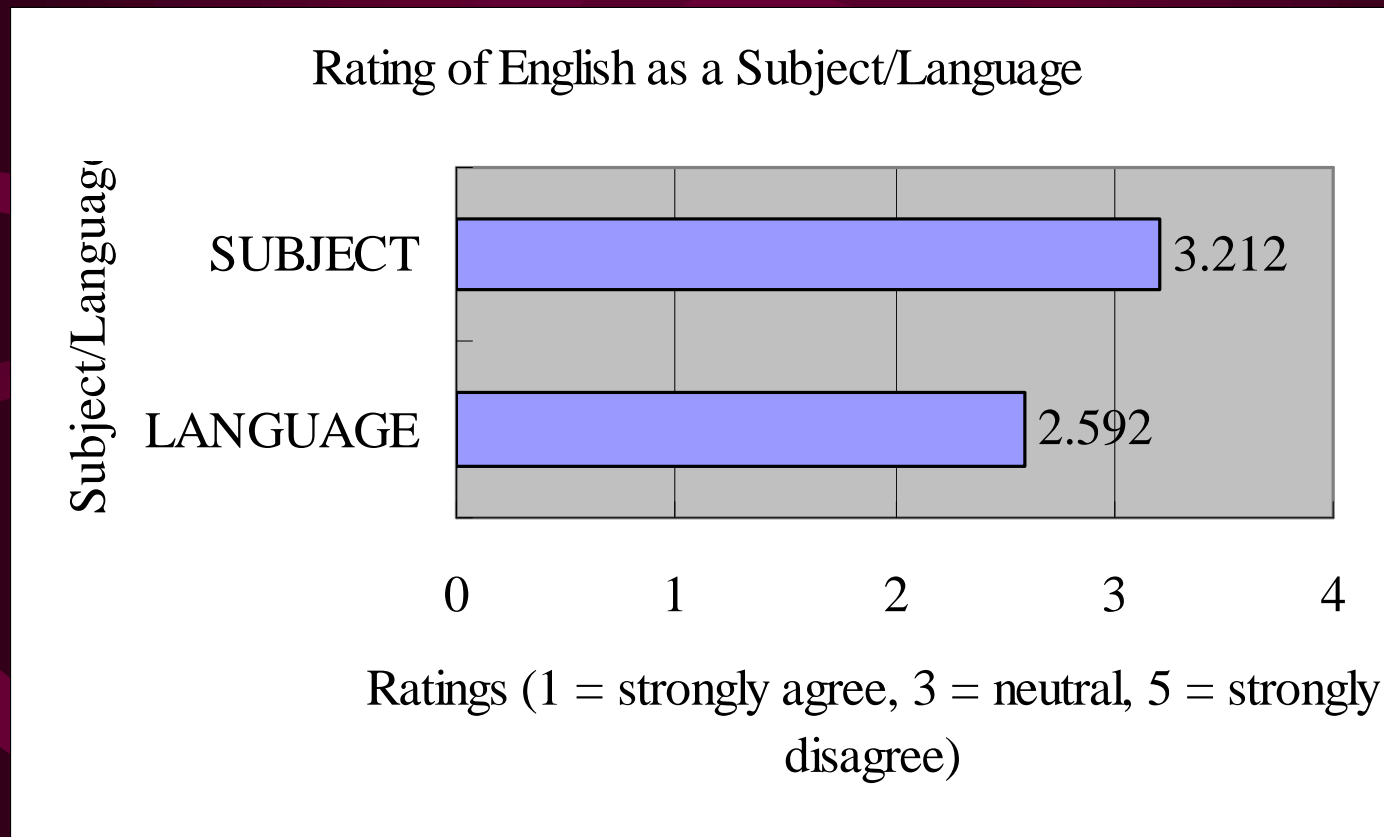
• Invented Languages

- Volapuk (Schleyer, 1880)
- Esperanto (Zamenhof, 1887)
- Idiom Neutral (Rosenberger, 1902)
- Latino Sine Flexione (Peano, 1903)
- Ido (1907)
- Occidental (1922)
- Novial (1928)
- Interglossa (1943)
- Interlingua (1951)
- Glosa (1981)

What Language? (3): A Case of English

- Subjects: 250 university students (124 males, 126 females). 81 Nursing, 126 engineering, and 43 medicine majors. (Convenient sample). Material: A questionnaire developed by the researcher. Pilot study done in the previous year. Procedure: Questionnaire administered in or outside class. (With informed consent)
- The students preferred English as a subject to English as a subject ($m_1=2.59$, $m_2=3.21$, $t=8.39$, $df=475$, $p<0.05$)
- The students preferred English as an international language to English as a second language for Japan: $M_1 = 2.54$, $M_2 = 2.11$, $t = 5.89$, $df = 480$, $p < 0.01$.

What Language (4): English as a Subject/Language

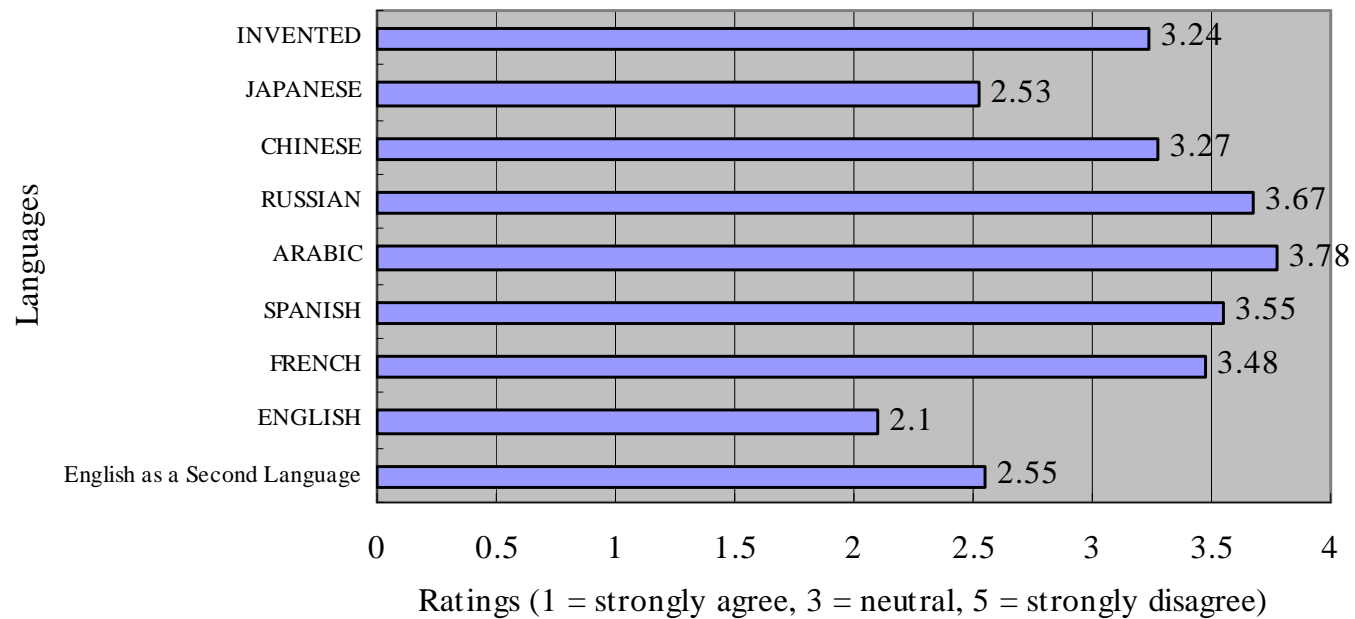


What Language? (5): A Case Study: The UN Official Languages, Japanese & Invented Languages

- The ratings for the following as the international official language:
- English = 2.1, Japanese = 2.53, Invented Language = 3.24, Chinese = 3.27, French = 3.48, Spanish = 3.55, Russian = 3.67, Arabic = 3.78. (ANOVA, $F = 107.465$, $df = 8,218$, $p < 0.05$) (cf., English as the official second language for Japan = 2.55).
- The reasons for the rating: (1) Ease of learning (28%); (2) Spread of the language (27%); (3) Familiarity with the language (20%); (4) Benefit of learning the language (18%), (5) others (7%).

What Language? (6): A Case Study (Graph)

Language Rating as an International Language (except for English as a Second Language for Japan)



What Language? (7) : Artificial Language

- Regularity of rules, spellings and pronunciation.
- Ease of learning.
- Relative neutrality.
- Ease of monitoring.
- Relatable to mother tongues.
- Rich range of functions.
- Standardized.
- Providing insight.
- Lack of history, tradition, or culture.
- Identity.
- Unfamiliarity, which fosters fear and aversion.
- Lack of motivation: How to persuade the world to learn it.
- Linguistic bias.
- Semantic differences.
- Antagonism.
- How to monitor its development.

What Language? (8) : Esperanto #1

“Regarding the subject of Esperanto...there is no reference either from Him (Abdu'l-Baha) or from Baha'u'llah that can make us believe that it will necessarily develop into the international auxiliary language of the future...Pending this final choice, the Baha'is are advised to study Esperanto only in consideration of the fact that the learning of this language can considerably facilitate inter-communication between individuals, groups and Assemblies throughout the Baha'i world in the present stage of the evolution of the Faith.” (A letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States and Canada, June 4, 1937, Lights of Guidance, #1140)

What Language? (9) : Esperanto #2

“This language (Esperanto) will be spread and universalized to a certain degree, but later on a language more complete than this, or the same language will undergo some changes and alterations and will be adopted and become universal...” (*Tablets of Abdu'l Baha*, Vol. III, p.692)

What Language? (10)

- **World Englishes**
- British
- American
- Canadian
- Australian
- New Zealand
- South African
- Irish
- Scots
- Welsh
- South Asian (Indian, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka)
- Southeast Asian (Phillipino)
- West African
- East African
- Caribbean
- Chinese
- Japanese

What Language? (11)

- **Modified Language**
- Basic English (British American Scientific International Commercial; C.K. Ogden, 1930)
- 850 words: 400 general nouns, 200 picturable objects, 100 general qualities, 50 opposites, 100 operations (adverbs, particles, etc.)

Who Will Adopt the Universal Language? (1)

- O members of parliaments throughout the world! Select ye a single language for the use of all on earth, and adopt ye likewise a common script. (Kitab-i-Aqdas, paragraph #189)
- It is incumbent upon all nations to appoint some men of understanding and erudition to convene a gathering and through joint consultation choose one language from among the varied existing languages, or create a new one, to be taught to the children in all the schools of the world. (*Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, pp.165-166)

Who Will Adopt the Universal Language? (2)

- The United Nations
- Six official languages: English, French, Russian, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese
- Future world government

Who Will Adopt the Universal Language? (3)

-We have enjoined upon the Trustees of the House of Justice either to choose one language from among those now existing or to adopt a new one, and in like manner to select a common script, both of which should be taught in all the schools of the world. Thus will the earth be regarded as one country and one home. (*Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, pp.127-128)
- English: The working common language at the World Centre.

Stages of Adoption (1): As an Auxiliary Language

- “..... It beseemeth you and the other officials of the Government to convene a gathering and choose one of the divers languages, and likewise one of the existing scripts, or else to create a new language and a new script to be taught children in schools throughout the world. They would, in this way, be acquiring only two languages, one their own native tongue, the other the language in which all the peoples of the world would converse. Were men to take fast hold on that which hath been mentioned, the whole earth would come to be regarded as one country, and the people would be relieved and freed from the necessity of acquiring and teaching different languages." (Epistle to the Son of Wolf)
- *In addition to the mother tongue, the auxiliary language is to be taught throughout the world.*

Stages of Adoption (2): As the Universal Common Language

- We have formerly ordained that people should converse in two languages, yet efforts must be made to reduce them to one, likewise the scripts of the world, that men's lives may not be dissipated and wasted in learning divers languages. Thus the whole earth would come to be regarded as one city and one land. (Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 68)
- Among the things which are conducive to unity and concord and will cause the whole earth to be regarded as one country is that the divers languages be reduced to one language and in like manner the scripts used in the world be confined to a single script. (*Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, pp.165-166)

Stages of Adoption (3): A Long, Slow Process?

- “What Baha’u’llah is referring to in the Eighth Leaf of the Exalted Paradise is a far distant time, when the world is really one country, and one language would be a sensible possibility. It does not contradict His instruction as to the need immediately for an auxiliary language.” (A letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual, March 16, 1946, Lights of Guidance, #1141)
- *Immediate need for an auxiliary language (short-term)*
- *Eventual adoption of one common language (long-term)*

Conclusion (1)

- Need for promoting understanding of the concept of universal language and bilingualism

Conclusion (2)

- Conscious efforts to build a bilingual society

Conclusion (3)

- International language education reform: earlier start, focus on practical skills first followed by academic skills

Conclusion (4)

- Today the greatest need of the world of humanity is discontinuance of the existing misunderstandings among nations. This can be accomplished through the unity of language. Unless the unity of languages is realized, the Most Great Peace and the oneness of the human world cannot be effectively organized and established because the function of language is to portray the mysteries and secrets of human hearts. The heart is like a box, and language is the key. Only by using the key can we open the box and observe the gems it contains. Therefore, the question of an auxiliary international tongue has the utmost importance. Through this means international education and training become possible; the evidence and history of the past can be acquired. The spread of the known facts of the human world depends upon language. The explanation of divine teachings can only be through this medium. As long as diversity of tongues and lack of comprehension of other languages continue, these glorious aims cannot be realized. Therefore, the very first service to the world of man is to establish this auxiliary international means of communication. It will become the cause of the tranquility of the human commonwealth. Through it sciences and arts will be spread among the nations, and it will prove to be the means of the progress and development of all races. We must endeavor with all our powers to establish this international auxiliary language throughout the world. It is my hope that it may be perfected through the bounties of God and that intelligent men may be selected from the various countries of the world to organize an international congress whose chief aim will be the promotion of this universal medium of speech. (Abdu'l - Baha , *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 60-61)

Concept of Artificial Language

- Creating a totally new one: Is this possible or practical? → Science of artificial language
- Creating a new one while borrowing elements from existing ones: Esperanto
- Modifying an existing one: Basic English

Predictions (1)

- English will continue to serve as a working world language.
- Science of artificial language will develop.
- Some form of artificial language will be adopted as the international auxiliary language, including a modified form of English.
- A world government will supervise and monitor the language.
- Once adopted the language will remain as such for a long time with, though, possible minor modifications along the way.

Predictions (2)

- The process of selection, adoption and modification is a dynamic one; in the long run, it may be repeated.
- The highest stage of development on this earth is the establishment of a world civilization culminating in the Golden Age.
- The next stage is that of an inter-planetary civilization, which will present its own linguistic and communication challenges.

Origin of Linguistic Diversity (1)

- **Genesis 11**

¹ Now the whole world had one language and a common speech.

² As men moved eastward, ^[1] they found a plain in Shinar ^[2] and settled there.

³ They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. ⁴ Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

⁵ But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. ⁶ The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."

⁸ So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹ That is why it was called Babel ^[3] -because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

Origin of Linguistic Diversity

(2)

- The implication of the story is that by overcoming human arrogance and learning humility and humbleness we may be able to unify the languages again.
- On the other hand, linguistic diversity added to the wealth of world views, knowledge systems and thoughts of diverse humanity. Just as the human race itself had diversified, so had the human language in its long journey of unity to multiplication.

What?

- Existing language: English, French, Chinese, Russian, Arabic, Spanish, Persian.....
- Dead language: Latin
- Modified language: Basic English
- Artificial language: Esperanto

How?

- Natural selection
- Consultation by the governments of the world: a world summit to be held. A world government to legislate.
- Legislation by the Universal House of Justice

When?

- Natural, unofficial, implicit, quiet selection: Already taking place = English).
- Immediate selection of an auxiliary language through consultation (a world summit?)
- Eventual adoption of one common universal language (several hundred years from now...?)

Stages of Adoption

- First, a working international language will play its role (=English for now).
- Second, an official auxiliary language will be adopted by the world government.
- Third, the Universal House of Justice will legislate and adopt one.
- Fourth, there will be a common world language.

Persuading the Peoples and Governments

- Challenge: Not learning a second language itself but persuasion of learning a second language

Rejection of English

- France
- Canada
- Japan
- India

Do you think English is the official international language of the whole world?

- Twenty out of 52 people responded 'yes' (38%) (Figure 3). But no one except one person could explain by who, when and where English was declared as the international language.

How many languages are there in the world?

- Most of the respondents (38 out of 52 = 73%) chose anywhere between 12 and 3,000. Eleven persons (21%) thought there were more than 10,000, whereas one person said as high as 7 million. Only one person (8th grader) chose from the range between 3,000 and 6,000 (see Figure 4).

Do you know the story of the Tower of Babel?

- Eleven out of 52 people (22%) could tell the story correctly.

How would you react if one of the follow languages were chosen as the official international language?

- For French, twenty people were in favor (38%), two in neutral, and 32 against (64%). For Arabic, 16 were in favor (31%), two in neutral, and 34 against (64%). For Chinese, twenty-two were in favor (42%), three in neutral, and 27 against (51%). Those who supported Chinese gave the reason that it has the largest number of speakers in the world. For Russian, thirteen were in favor (25%), 9 in neutral (17%), and 30 against (58%). For Spanish, 32 were in favor (62%), three in neutral, and 16 against (12%).

Give the names of invented languages you know

- The names mentioned include: Esperanto (12), Pig Latin (10), sign language (4), computer language (5), and Braille (2). Others mentioned "slang," while one person said that all languages were invented (see Figure 7).

*Have you had any communication problems
with non-native English speakers before?*

- Seventeen out of 52 subjects expressed some "serious problems" (31%); two (4%) expressed "minor problems," while the majority (34 persons = 65%) had mostly "positive experiences." The percentage of the negative experiences was surprisingly low (35%; see Figure 6).

What is bilinguality? What is bilingualism?

- Bilinguality:
- Bilingualism:

Myths of Bilinguality

- 1. Bilinguals can do anything in two languages. That is, bilinguals' linguistic ability is equal to that of monolinguals in both languages.
- 2. Bilinguality, once "attained," is retained throughout the lifetime.
- 3. Children of two monolingual parents of different languages will naturally grow up to be bilingual.
- 4. Bilinguals are confused linguistically.
- 5. Bilinguals are confused culturally.

Two Extremes to Avoid

- 1. Clinging to one's native language and excluding others including the common language.
- 2. Disregarding the native language and forcing the common language.

The Middle Path

- 1. The middle path has multi-dimensions.
- Natives should make the utmost efforts to learn the common language. Means are now available.
- 2. Foreigners should try to learn the native language as much as possible.
- 3. In principle, respect the native language and do not force the common language.
- 4. At the same time, demonstrate the beauty and usefulness of the common language in international communication.
- 5. Make the best use of the native-monolingual mode, the bilingual mode and common-tongue-monolingual mode.
- 6. Study about bilinguality and bilingualism.

Solutions?

- Be ready to learn the international language. Humbleness, patience and perseverance are needed.
- Make efforts to learn the language of the land where one resides.
- On one hand, respect the language of the land and on the other promote the common language. This is a relative matter and situationally changeable.