

# The Secret of International Auxiliary Languages



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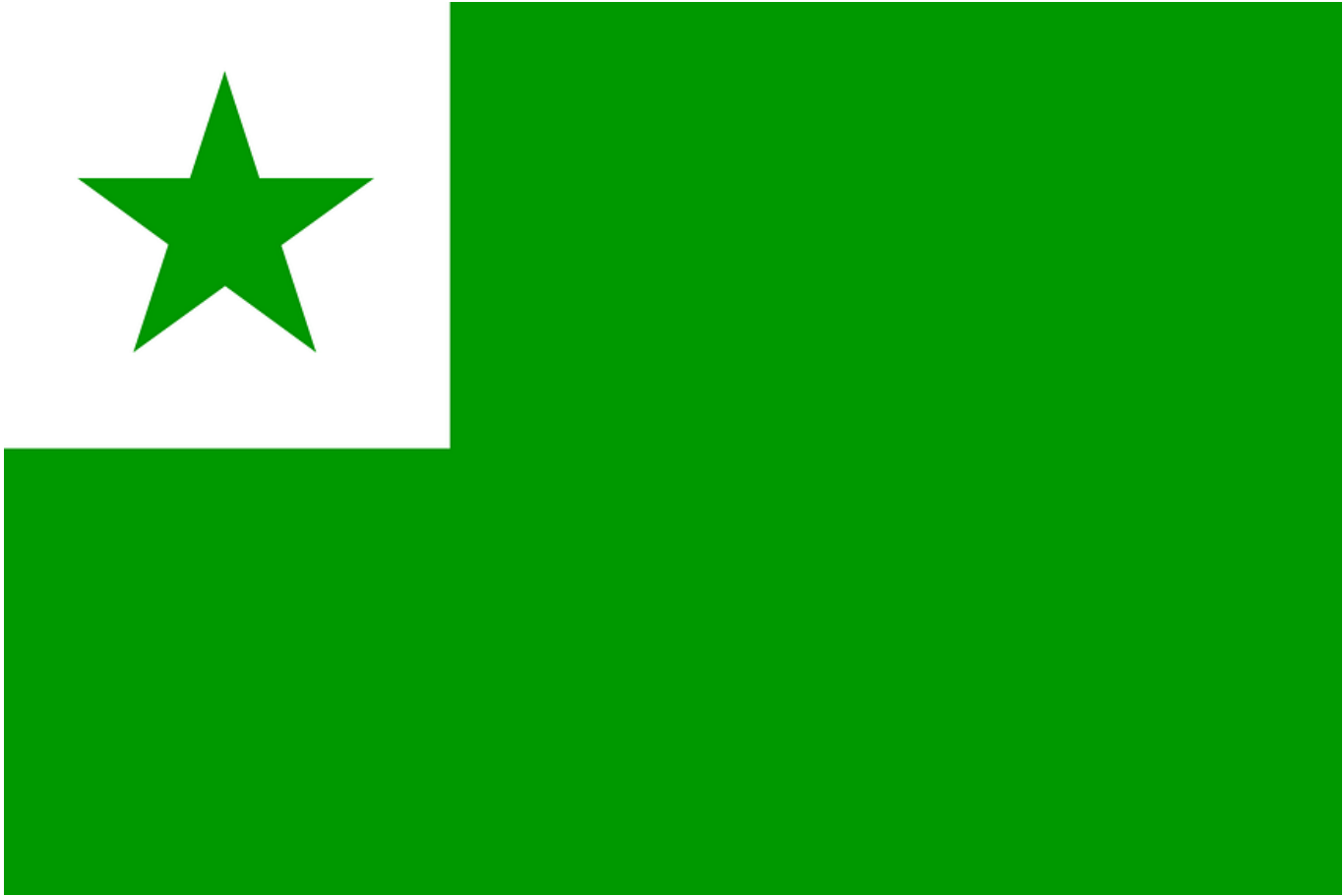
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What Is an International Auxiliary Language? Why Are They  
Useful?

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Flag of the Esperanto language, the most famous international auxiliary language

Everyone has different values.

Let's face it, with all the political, religious, economic, cultural, social, and linguistic differences around the world, it's hard to find a truly universal set of values among everyone.

It's basic psychology. Different people value different things.

You've been raised with a set of values that you've most likely inherited from your parents, family, friends, peers, teachers, and mentors that you've carried your entire life. Values you've always assumed to be true. Values that you've never questioned.

Other people have been raised with different sets of values than ours, sometimes very similar, sometimes very different. The root of the matter is how do we stretch our minds? How do we challenge our beliefs?

So how do we achieve some sense of universal values?

Has there ever been a time when you wanted to be able to see from everyone's eyes at once but felt regret that you couldn't?

Well, it's very difficult for people to actually take the time to see the world from another's eyes, much less everyone else's eyes, but there is a way that can at least superficially be achieved.

Have you ever traveled around the world without knowing someone else's language? Do you feel familiar with the frustration of trying to communicate with them when they didn't speak English or your native language and you didn't speak their language?

Do you wish the world spoke a language that could bridge all these differences in culture around the world so you would find it easier to talk to foreigners and actually be able to deeply communicate with them?

Enter the world of international auxiliary languages. As you do, prepare for your assumptions to be challenged.

## **What Is An International Auxiliary Language?**



Let's begin with pulling up the Wikipedia definition:

**An international auxiliary language**

(sometimes abbreviated as IAL or auxlang) or

interlanguage is a **language** meant for

communication between people from different

nations who do not share a common first

**language**. An **auxiliary language** is primarily

a second **language**.

Languages such as Arabic, French, Russian, Spanish, Mandarin, among others, and especially English have been very influential

languages in various parts of the world in recent years, and English is even used as the international language of business. However popular languages such as these tend to always stir conflict and resistance in people because of their dominant status in economics, politics, or culture and because of this many people have come up with constructed languages as a practical solution to this problem.

Auxiliary means that this language is not intended to be a first language or to replace anyone's native language, and auxiliary languages are often used as constructed languages for international communication. Famous examples of this include Volapük, Esperanto, Ido, and Interlingua.

## **Why Are International Auxiliary Languages Useful?**

International Auxiliary languages are often critiqued as “useless” because of the status of English currently as the international

language of business. To add to that, there have been numerous practical problems of actually implementing an artificial language as the world's international language because of the languages being "too Eurocentric", "not European-looking enough" (as most international auxiliary languages are based heavily on Romance languages), too complicated of a grammar, not enough grammar, pronunciation is too hard, the language is too hard for Asians/Africans/Europeans/etc. to learn, or statements such as "everyone speaks English, why don't we use that?". While many of these critiques are valid, all international auxiliary languages have several advantages over natural languages in terms of the learning curve.

They are designed to be easy to learn

They are not culturally biased (for example international auxiliary languages lack slang and idioms)

They try to put everyone on an equal footing

They can be learned much quicker than their natural counterparts

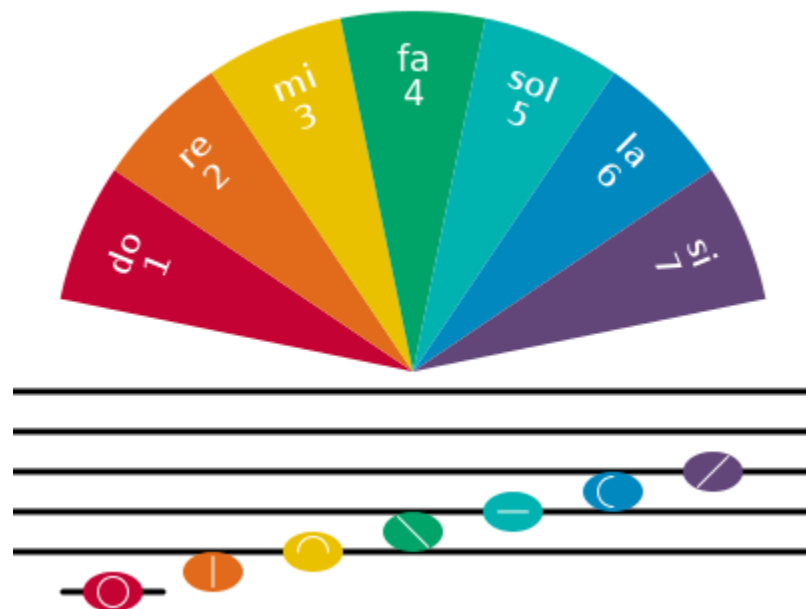
They are designed for practical immediate use (unlike, for example, J.R.R. Tolkien's artistic languages designed only for the Middle Earth universe)

They have no irregularities in grammar or pronunciation

They are simple, regular, logical, and creative

Let's dive into a brief history of how international auxiliary languages came about.

## A Brief History of International Auxiliary Languages





“The seven conventional notes, colors, syllables, numerals, and glyphs used to convey Solresol phonemes.” (from Wikipedia)

Solresol was the first auxiliary language created by François Sudre, a French violinist, composer, and music teacher, created a language based on musical notes which was at the height of its popularity in the late 19th and early 20th century. However that popularity faded when Volapük and Esperanto gained much more popularity. Solresol only has a small community of enthusiasts around the world who use it that thanks to the Internet have been connected together.



Volapük Language

Volapük was the first auxiliary language that had a significant impact among many competing auxiliary languages in the late 19th century. While international auxiliary languages came and went from proposal after proposal, Volapük was the first one that gained a large following around the world. Created by Johann Martin Schleyer, a German Catholic priest, he described the benefits of having his international language in an article and book he wrote in 1879 and 1880. Three conferences were held on the Volapük language in 1884 (in Friedrichshafen), 1887 (in Munich), and 1889 (in Paris), the last of which was entirely conducted in Volapük. Loosely based on a mix of English, French, and German with a grammar based on various European languages, many of the words were changed beyond recognition to make the language harder for any one nationality to learn but the language was still designed to be simple. At the height of its popularity in 1889, Volapük had around 283 clubs, 25 periodicals in or about Volapük, and 316 textbooks in 25 languages. However several factors contributed to its downfall. One of these factors was in the years of the Volapük academy's

existence, the Dutch cryptographer Auguste Kerckhoffs (who had spread the academy to many countries) and the academy and Schleyer got into a tension over the academy's desire to make reforms to the language, Kerckhoffs among the academy, and Schleyer not wanting the language to be changed and demanding that he keep ownership of the language.

Then in 1890, only a year after the last Volapük conference, the Volapük community members got into heated arguments over the future of the language. A series of schisms occurred, as Schleyer himself left the Volapük academy and created a rival academy, and then more schisms happened creating many derivatives of Volapük that were quickly abandoned. There were violent arguments over how the language should be written.

Another factor of the decline of Volapük was the rise of Idiom Neutral, a Latin-based international language, along with Esperanto, a language based on a mix of Germanic, Romance, and Slavic languages. The language finally went into decline when it was suppressed during World War II, only to be revived

in recent years with the Internet's ascent. Volapük now has a Wikipedia page with 176,792 articles, one of the larger Wikipedias, and at one time it surpassed the Esperanto Wikipedia in number of articles, though Esperanto now has the largest Wikipedia of any constructed language.

Esperanto is perhaps the most famous example of an international auxiliary language. However even so there are still many people who haven't heard of it at all. Yet it's made quite an impact. Two major motion pictures have been produced entirely in Esperanto, including Incubus starring William Shatner (yeah, he actually speaks Esperanto!). It's presently the only auxiliary language that has a course on Duolingo and the only one that has a large online following. Esperanto came into existence when Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof, a Polish-Jewish medical doctor, inventor, and writer, became fascinated by the idea of world peace and wanted to achieve that by creating an international auxiliary language.

From Wikipedia:

“The place where I was born and spent my childhood gave direction to all my future struggles. In Białystok the inhabitants were divided into four distinct elements: Russians, Poles, Germans and Jews; each of these spoke their own language and looked on all the others as enemies. In such a town a sensitive nature feels more acutely than elsewhere the misery caused by language division and sees at every step that the

diversity of languages is the first, or at least the most influential, basis for the separation of the human family into groups of enemies. I

was brought up as an idealist; I was taught that all people were brothers, while outside in the street at every step I felt that there were no people, only Russians, Poles, Germans, Jews and so on. This was always a great torment to my infant mind, although many people may smile at such an 'anguish for the world' in a child. Since at that time I thought

that ‘grown-ups’ were omnipotent, so I often  
said to myself that when I grew up I would  
certainly destroy this evil.”

— L. L. Zamenhof, in a letter to Nikolai  
Borovko, ca. 1895

He set to work on the language which he called La Internacia  
Lingvo (Esperanto: The International Language) in 1873 while he  
was still in school which he hoped would be a language that  
everyone could learn as a second language to foster better  
intercultural understanding. He called himself Esperanto (one  
who hopes) as his pseudonym when he wrote his publications  
Unua Libro (First Book) in 1887, Dua Libro (Second Book) in  
1888, and Fundamento de Esperanto (Foundation of Esperanto)

in 1905. However La Internacia Lingvo was called by its early learners and users Esperanto after Zamenhof's pseudonym and the name stuck with the language.

From Wikipedia:

“Up to two million people worldwide, to varying degrees, speak Esperanto,[10] including about 1,000 to 2,000 native speakers who learned Esperanto from birth.[1] The World Esperanto Association has more than 5,500 members in 120[11] countries. Its usage is highest in Europe, East Asia, and South



America.[12] lernu!, the most popular online learning platform for Esperanto, reported 150,000 registered users in 2013, and sees between 150,000 and 200,000 visitors each month.[13] With about 239,000 articles, Esperanto Wikipedia is the 32nd-largest Wikipedia as measured by the number of articles,[14] and is the largest Wikipedia in a constructed language.[15] On 22 February 2012, Google Translate added Esperanto as its 64th language.[16] On 28 May 2015, the

language learning platform Duolingo launched an Esperanto course for English speakers. As of 5 April 2017, over 800,000 users had signed up,[17][18][19] with approximately 30 users completing the course every day.[20]”

The first World Congress of Esperanto was held in Boulogne-Sur-Mer in France in 1905. Since then, with the exception of World Wars, there have been Esperanto World Congresses held in different countries each year. “Esperantujo” is the name given to anywhere where Esperanto is spoken. It was proposed as the working language of the League of Nations as the international language in the place of French. The proposal was accepted by all the delegates except for the French delegate Gabriel Hanotaux, who saw Esperanto as a threat to the position of French as the

international language and blamed Esperanto for the decline of French's international status.

Has Esperanto achieved the goals of its creator? A common answer to that is yes and no. While Esperanto lost out to English as the international lingua franca and universal second language, with the advent of the Internet it has been making a comeback and more people around the world are taking interest in learning the language. There is currently a global community of 2 million plus speakers of the language scattered in most countries and there are even 1,000–2,000 native speakers that were born to Esperanto-speaking parents. Native Esperanto speakers, who are quite a rarity, grow up bilingual, trilingual, or multilingual growing up not just with Esperanto but with their parents' languages and/or the surrounding dominant language if it isn't the language or languages of their parents. The language has a Slavic-sounding phonology, a primarily Romance and Germanic vocabulary (with minor contributions from Slavic languages and Greek), and an agglutinating grammar (agglutination is when

roots, grammatical endings, and prefixes and suffixes are put together to form a word or sentence, agglutination comes from the Latin word agglutinare — “to glue together”).

There was a schism in the Esperanto movement which created various Esperantidos (derivatives of Esperanto) to modify the Esperanto language. A form of the language was chosen by the Delegation for the Adoption of an International Auxiliary Language when the Delegation was deciding which international auxiliary language should be chosen for international use. There was debate over whether a new international auxiliary language should be created or a previously existing language should be chosen. ultimately, as it was the only international auxiliary language with a sizable proportion of speakers since Volapük fragmented, Esperanto was chosen, but with modifications. This modification of Esperanto, which removed the accented letters and the accusative case and some of the endings were changed to resemble Italian and Latin, was called Ido (offspring in Esperanto) and Ido eventually branched off into an offspring

language and developed its own identity. The defections from the Esperanto movement caused friction in the Esperanto community and led to the decline of Esperanto, and while most Esperantidos died off, Ido persisted and developed its own movement, which was unfortunately suspended due to the events of World War I and then Ido's major intellectual supporter, Danish linguist Otto Jespersen, created his own language called Novial, defecting from the Ido movement, causing Ido to decline even further. However like with Esperanto and other international auxiliary languages, the advances of the Internet have made a revival of the language possible and there is a small movement around Ido.

Interlingua is a naturalistic (imitates natural languages) international auxiliary language that was created by the International Auxiliary Language Association between 1937 and 1951. It is a language based on Latin and Romance languages and it is completely intelligible to anyone that speaks those languages without any prior study. It also has a simplified grammar with

roots, prefixes, and suffixes derived from Latin. There are also some influences from other non-Romance languages in the vocabulary as long as the vocabulary has been deemed “internationally known”. When they determined after testing many different international auxiliary languages that they couldn’t choose any of them, to the surprise of many the IALA decided to craft their own language into existence. Interlingua gained a big following, about the same size as that of Ido but still much smaller than that of Esperanto. Interlingua was the last international auxiliary language to successfully gain a large number of followers so far. Like with other international auxiliary languages, it has some active speakers as well as a presence in media and the Internet.

Sona is an international auxiliary language created by Kenneth Searight and he published a book in 1935 describing the language. Searight created Sona as a counteraction to the Eurocentricity of most other international auxiliary languages such as Esperanto, Volapük, and Ido. Unlike Solresol it was

designed as a language for practical purposes and has a vocabulary that's combined from many different languages around the world, including English, Arabic, Turkish, Mandarin, and Japanese. It is a completely regular and logical language with an extremely simple grammar that consists of 360 radicals or root words plus an additional 15 particles. Ideas and sentences are formed by combining radicals for example ra meaning male and ko meaning child being combined to form rako meaning boy. The language hasn't been very successful in its outreach and Searight's book is the only book available for describing and learning the Sona language. There is a small online community of enthusiasts today that learns and uses the language.

Other international auxiliary languages exist, such as Occidental, Idiom Neutral, Novial, Lojban, and Loglan, as well as some newly formed languages like Kotava, Lingua Franca Nova, and Toki Pona. More info will be written about those in future articles.

# **International Auxiliary Languages in the Modern World**

Nowadays, while international auxiliary languages are usually considered an obscure subject, they are increasing in popularity online. In online language communities around the world, international auxiliary languages, in particular Esperanto, have been increasingly seen as useful and even fun for people to learn. Different people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds and value sets have been better able to communicate with each other than by just learning English to communicate. That doesn't preclude the necessity of English being used as a language of communication but it does give people a way to interact around the world without culturally based filters. Esperanto is the most common international auxiliary language learned by language enthusiasts. There have been numerous courses created to cater to various types of language learners, for example on Memrise there are an enormous amount of free user-produced courses for a large number of constructed languages and on Unilang there is



a huge forum full of message boards discussing constructed languages as well as courses for many free courses for such languages.

## **Our Upcoming Workshops on International Auxiliary Languages**

Circuit Youth is hosting a series of workshops on learning foreign languages (including international auxiliary languages) this summer to get the public interested in learning a language together with us. This is a great way to create a community to bond together in the Maker Movement. Follow us on our Facebook page to find out about dates and workshops!

While we may not exactly have a set of universal values, there is a way to make a bridge.

We are different people of different values, yet we can find common ground.

International auxiliary languages are a way of fostering such common ground.

### **International Auxiliary Languages**

International Auxiliary Languages (IALs) are languages constructed with the aim of facilitating communication between...

[interlanguages.net](http://interlanguages.net)

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