Temenia

Prolegomena to any future International Auxiliary Language

Introduction

What is this?

Temenia is an International Auxiliary Language (IAL). An IAL is a constructed language (as opposed to a "natural" language) whose purpose is to foster communications between people who otherwise would not share a common language. This means, obviously, that all proposed IALs are intended to be much easier to learn than any existent natural language.

More specifically, Temenia is a model of the process by which an IAL is constructed. In the "Rationale" document, all of the choices made during the construction of Temenia are explained. Although not every IAL will be identical to Temenia, the same issues will need to be resolved. The "Rationale" document explains the reasons behind my answers to those issues. Others may choose to answer differently.

Why?

A fair question that you might ask is, "Why have you created Temenia?" Or, "Isn't Esperanto good enough?" Or even, "Don't you have better things to do?"

All of these are good, valid questions, and you deserve an answer.

As mentioned above, Temenia is *not* proposed as an IAL. Rather, it is an exercise in auxiliary language construction. The best way to explain the subtle difference is to use an analogy of a composer who has created musical compositions. The first few attempts at musical composition never result in a great sonata or symphony. Rather, these first attempts need to be considered as exercises. The experience of creating these compositions will lead the composer to better compositions as he reviews his work and sees the mistakes and improvements that are possible. Language construction is similar. However, there is an important difference. Whereas the composition of a musical piece and its performance and review may be a matter of months, the construction of a language takes longer. This is especially true if you consider that the "performance" of a constructed language implies that a small community of individuals learn the language and document their experiences of learning it and attempting to use it as a vehicle of communication. Each language "composition" may require years of analysis, construction, and testing. Nevertheless, without this experience, the quality of constructed languages will not improve. Because of the long timeframe required for the cycle of development and review of constructed languages, it is not feasible for one individual to design more than several during a lifetime. However, in order to gain the experience needed to be able to construct an *excellent* IAL, many of these languages need

to be created and tested. To complete the analogy, the equivalent of our musical composer is not a single linguist, but rather all of humanity, which jointly needs to go through the exercise of constructing many, many IALs before the requisite experience has been gained that will allow for the construction of a good one. In my opinion, considering the complexity of the task of language construction, on the order of 500 *serious* IALs need to be developed before enough experience will have been garnered where we (that is, humanity) will have the knowledge to know how to design a language.

I have created Temenia to be "one of the 500" prerequisite languages that I believe need to be constructed before humanity can do justice to this task. As for Esperanto (or Interlingua, or Ido, or Aiola, or whatever your favorite IAL happens to be), it also is one of the 500, and much can be learned from its good points and its shortcomings.

On a personal note, I am a member of the Bahá'í Faith. One of the tenets of the Bahá'í Faith is that eventually the world will adopt an International Auxiliary Language, which will aid international and intercultural communication and thereby promote peace and harmony. I hope that the construction of Temenia may help achieve, in some slight way, that noble goal.

Pidgin vs. Expressive...

The hallmark of an International Auxiliary Language is that it is easy to learn. If a proposed IAL is no easier to learn than, say, English or Russian, then why not just select one of those existent languages to function as an IAL? To be successful an IAL must be *very* easy to learn, and furthermore, if it is truly intended to be an *international* auxiliary language, then it should be easy to learn by everyone, regardless whether their native language is English, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Tagalog, or any language whatsoever.

There are two approaches to easing the burden of learning a new language. Both of them can be done simultaneously. One is to eliminate irregularities. This minimizes how much has to be memorized. The other is to remove linguistic features not common to most languages.

Pursuing these approaches seems like a good idea, until it is actually attempted. Regularizing is not the difficulty, it is the reduction of linguistic features to those shared by many languages. The issue is that there is not much left in the intersection. Out goes number (singular/plural), out goes tense (and mode and aspect), out go relative clauses, adverbial clauses, and just about everything else, too. What is left is a pidgin, that is, an auxiliary language created spontaneously between two distinct linguistic communities who have a need to communicate. The existence of a pidgin allows the peoples who use it to communicate basic concepts such as are needed to trade goods or express immediate needs. Pidgins have very simple grammars and small vocabularies.

The issue with a pidgin is that it lacks expressiveness. A pidgin is fine if you want to trade a dozen eggs for a cotton scarf, but it is not a useful communication tool if you want to describe how to avoid complications postoperatively after mitral valve replacement, or if you want to write a poem to your beloved describing how she is more precious to you

than the lustrously perfect black pearl hidden inside the giant oyster nestled at the bottom of the deepest abyss of the darkest ocean. Perhaps it is possible to express those things using a pidgin, but even the speakers of the pidgin would prefer the use of their native language to make sure that the point got across (so that both the cardiac patient and the love affair survive).

An effective IAL, therefore, needs to be as simple to learn as a pidgin (or simpler) and yet have adequate expressive power to communicate complicated concepts. The solution I have adopted for Temenia is to embed a pidgin within the language. That is, there is a basic grammar of Temenia, which is very simple to learn and allows those who know it to communicate simple concepts. However, the full grammar is richer than that, and proficient speakers of Temenia can use its expressivity.

An example might make this clearer. Spanish is an inflectional language, so that, in a well-formed sentence, each verb must take an inflectional suffix which expresses the person, tense, aspect, and mode. For example, a speaker could say:

> *Comí*
> *I ate*

or

> *Comías*
> *You were eating*

In order to utter a well-formed sentence, the speaker must be able to correctly inflect the verb. It might be possible to use only the verb stem to communicate the intention, by saying:

> **Come ayer*
> **I eat yesterday*

But such an utterance would be considered incorrect. In Temenia, you can do this and the sentences are considered well-formed and correct. It is acceptable to extract the tense, aspect, mode, number, and other linguistic features lexically (for example, by using the word, *yesterday*) or merely from context, without the use of any inflectional (or other syntactical) or periphrastic devices. This allows the use of Temenia without the learning of complex grammatical morphology. Of course, you still have to learn the vocabulary.

However, syntax does exist in Temenia to express the semantic relationships, such as tense or aspect, if the speaker desires and is proficient in Temenia. It is the "optionality" of Temenia's grammar that delivers the compromise between the ease of learning of a pidgin and the expressiveness of a mature, natural language.

A Word about Vocabulary

Most of the lexicon (that is, the vocabulary) for Temenia was generated randomly. A few words, those that are common to the most widely spoken languages, were "hand crafted." For example, the Temenia word for *mother* is (phonetically) *mama,* and for father, *papa.*

How common are these two words? The correspondence to the European languages is evident, and even for Arabic (phonetically *umm* and *ab*) respectively, it is reasonably close.

Since Temenia is not a proposed IAL but an exercise in the design of an IAL, a lexicon consisting of randomly chosen words should be quite adequate. I know that other constructed languages, such as Lojban, make a very serious attempt to select word stems that are associated closely with the most widely spoken of the world's languages. However, in my opinion, this has been a failure. Widely spoken languages such as English, Mandarin, Hindi, Spanish, and Arabic, are just too different to be able to select a lexicon that will aid all learners to memorize the lexicon easily. The algorithm that Lojban employs results in words that usually are unrecognizable to speakers of any of its source languages; by attempting to draw from *all* languages the chosen words are cognates to *none*. Of course, if one is willing to derive the lexicon from a restricted set of source languages, such as only Romance languages, then a lexicon that is easily recognizable can be developed. For "universal" cognates, however, this is simply not possible. The commonality simply does not exist, except for a very few words as mentioned above.

What are the other documents...

There are eight other documents that are available from this web site.

"Phonetics and *Orthography"* describes how Temenia is written and how it is pronounced. This is accompanied by a web page where you can listen to the pronunciation of the basic sounds (phonemes) of Temenia.

"Simple Grammar" describes the basic (pidgin-like) grammar of Temenia and is sufficient to start speaking it.

"Complete Grammar" is a reference document that describes the complete grammar of Temenia.

"English-Temenia Lexicon" and *"Temenia-English Lexicon"* list the vocabulary of Temenia, currently approximately 2,200 words.

The English words in the lexicon represent the merger of *Ogden's Basic English* (850 words), Peter Bergman's *The Concise Dictionary of 26 Languages* (1,000 words), and the *Voice of America* word book (1,500 words). After removing duplicates, this resulted in slightly more than 2,000 words, which were then "translated" into random Temenia words.

The document *"Dialogues"* contains simple dialogues in Temenia, along with annotated translations in English. This can be used as an aid to learning spoken (and written) Temenia. This document is accompanied by a web page where you can listen to the dialogues as spoken.

The document **_"Translations"_** contains a few translations of short excerpts from well-known sources into Temenia. This may give you a flavor of the Temenia language, as well as demonstrate its expressive capabilities.

The **_"Rationale"_** describes the rationale for all of the decisions made during the design of Temenia, from the phonology and the alphabet, through the morphology and syntax of the grammar. This document may be especially useful to other language constructors who wish to review the thought processes that led to the development of Temenia. If you just want to learn how to speak Temenia, then you may find this document to be rather technical. Feel free to skip it.

Why did you construct a language instead of creating: "The theory and practice of constructing a language?"

It may seem more important to create an instruction manual describing how to construct an international auxiliary language, along with the abstract linguistic theory behind it, rather than present an actual constructed language along with the rationale describing the reasons behind the choices made during its construction. But I chose to construct an IAL for several reasons, which are outlined below.

1. In order to write a general theory and practice for the construction of candidate auxiliary languages, there would need to be a more extensive background of experience in this particular linguistic field. This background does not exist, or at least, there are no published findings that I could reference. It is not feasible for me to develop such an over-arching theory by myself.
2. Even if I could create a theory of constructing languages, it necessarily would have to be at a very abstract level. Abstract theories are hard to understand compared to concrete realizations or examples of a theory. I believe it will be easier for others to understand the process one goes through in the creation of an auxiliary language by looking at the one that I created and reviewing the rationale behind its design choices, than to understand it all from the study of an abstract theory. In general, I think this is closer to the manner in which most people learn. Does one learn how to compose classical music more from studying the scores of compositions, or more from reading abstract musicological theories?
3. It seems to me that the creation of a future international auxiliary language will necessarily follow similar paths to the ones I chose. The set of source languages which I selected are the most commonly spoken languages in the world today. In fifty or one hundred years it is unlikely that the set of most commonly languages spoken will change dramatically. The possible options in a language, such as constituent word order, or pre- or postpositional placement of adpositions, will be the same choices that any creator of a constructed language will need to make. These choices will be based on the same, or similar, set of source languages that I used. Therefore, the most likely aspects of an international auxiliary language to change are the set of permissible phonemes, the morphophonemic structure, and the lexicon; not the grammar.

How does this tie into the Bahá'í Faith?

The eventual adoption of an international auxiliary language is one of the tenets of the Bahá'í Faith. No less than the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas,* the most holy book of the Bahá'í Faith, specifically mentions the adoption of a world-wide IAL in paragraph 189 as follows:

> *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!*

As a Bahá'í, who speaks five languages (English, French, German, Arabic, and Spanish) and who has studied linguistics, it seemed to me that I was qualified to design a language that might, someday, be useful to those tasked by the "parliaments throughout the world" to develop or select an international auxiliary language to be adopted by the world. I do not believe for an instant that Temenia will be that language that is selected. I do hope, however, that its construction may help others by demonstrating both its strong points and weak points.

One of the objectives that I tried to achieve in the design of Temenia's grammar was sufficient expressive power to be able to translate the prayers and writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith. This is why I have insisted that Temenia not only be very simple to learn, but expressive enough to function as a "fully featured" language.
I hope that I have had some success in this regard.

Join the Community

The construction of a language that can fulfill the various requirements of an International Auxiliary Language is a difficult and very protracted process. The best way to proceed is to follow the scientific method. This involves three steps:
1. Learn the candidate language and practice it within a linguistic community
2. Consult on the strengths and weaknesses of the learning process: what was easy and what was difficult?
3. Send your feedback to the language creators so that they can improve the language

Then… iterate these steps again, and again, and again.

If you would like to help the world move toward the adoption of an International Auxiliary Language, here is one suggestion: Join the community of speakers of Temenia. Enlist your friends and colleagues in this endeavor. Send your feedback on your experiences in learning Temenia to us at comments@temenia.org (or whatever is the contact e-mail address, as shown on the web site).

Eventually, we can achieve this great goal—the construction and adoption of a true International Auxiliary Language, which will prove to be *"the greatest instrument for promoting harmony and civilization"* and a step toward world peace.