
Interanto: the global language of signs

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A tale of two cities (Zurich and Uppsala) and their street and store signs



THE FOLLOWING study began by chance in the early summer of 1999, during a visit to Zurich in Switzerland, and continued a week later in Uppsala in Sweden. In each location, I walked around a chosen area in the city centre, making notes, and in Uppsala I also took photographs. In Zurich, having strolled the more touristy streets, I found myself in Seefeld-Strasse, a deceptively stolid thoroughfare which proved to have a diverse clutch of largely internationalized signs: see Panel 1. In Uppsala, I went twice round the block in which my city-centre hotel, the Radisson Gillet, was situated, noting a plethora of signs on both sides of the four street sections involved: see Panel 2. These forays led to the discussion that follows.

International signs

It is not unusual nowadays to find English expressions on street and store signs in parts of the world where, only a few years ago, they might not have been present at all – or if present would have been modest. Nigel Ross considered this topic in 1997, in ‘Signs of International English’ (ET50, April). Although interested in such signs worldwide, he focused on Milan in Italy, and the signs that he discussed were all in the neighbourhood where he was living. They included: *Apply* (= ‘Apple-y’), *Armony Bar*, *Beauty Day’s*, *Funny Bike*, *Gold-Park Bar*, *Idea Books*, *Gadget’s*, *Green Garden*, *Hair Stylist Simpaty* [sic], *Lady Jane*, *Orient Carpets*, *Over the Top*, *Smarty* (a dress shop) and *Tronky* (a chocolate snack). About such signs he noted that:

- they are common and widespread

- minor Italian-related alterations sometimes occur (intentionally or otherwise), as with *armony* (cf. *armonia*) for ‘harmony’ and *simpaty* (cf. *simpatia*) for ‘sympathy’
- the apostrophe can be used as an identifier of English (often erroneously for a plural rather than for a possessive or to mark absence), as with *Beauty Day’s* and *Gadget’s*
- there may be an element of pseudo-English, as with *Apply* from ‘apple’ (compare ‘orangy’, ‘fruity’) and *Tronky* from nothing in particular (but consider *dinky* and *funky*).

Ross summed up as follows:

A sign in English, even in an English of sorts, is therefore a sign of prestige, style and modernity – factors which are very dear to the Milanese, as well as to many people the world over.... The role that English plays today in the world is therefore due in part to the appeal of Anglo-American lifestyles, values and cultures. The fact that English is continually associated with latest developments in the fields of science,

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business, pop music, cinema, and so on means that English still maintains a lot of its fashionable prestige in spite of some moves away from an Anglocentric view.... Signs of the times? Signs of International English.

He also noted that the appeal of English in Italy may be declining under pressure from 'a more traditional, natural lifestyle' that has led to 'a return of more homely, traditional Italian signs, at least in some sectors'.

Macaronic tendencies

While accepting the conclusions that Ross has drawn from his Milanese study, I would add that signs which mark internationalism and trendiness (and include strong doses of English) can co-occur with both signs that straightforwardly maintain – or seek to revive – local usages and signs that draw on other languages than English. Any polarization between the global and the local seems to me therefore to be part of a larger 'macaronic' inclination in which English may be only one element among many, no matter how notable it is. In other words, there is more to internationalism and globalization than the relentless march of English.

The term *macaronic* derives from Late Latin *macaronicus* (which in turn derives from Late Greek *makaria* 'barley food'), as in the song title *Carmen macaronicum* ('A Macaronic Song') in 1490. This song was popularized by the monk Teofilo Folengo in 1517 in his *Liber Macaronices*, a work that he described as 'literary macaroni': i.e., a jumble of languages. In due course, the term *macaronic* was used for burlesque or other verse in which Latin and vernacular words (often given Latin endings) are mixed together, just as flour, cheese, and butter are mixed to get macaroni. The following Latin-based example has been attributed to the Scottish writer William Drummond (1684):

Maggeam, magis doctam milkare coweas, Et
doctam sweepare flooras, et sternere beddas
[Tr 'Maggie, rather learned in milking cows,
sweeping floors, and making beds.']

There was also, however, more serious verse in which Latin was used within vernacular patterns of words, metre, and rhyme. Such macaronic verse appeared, not surprisingly, at a time when Latin was still the Western European language of learning, as in 'A Lament for the Makaris', a poem by another Scot, William

Dunbar. Here, a *makar* ('maker') is a poet, the word serving to loan-translate into Scots the Greek *poietes* ('maker, creator'). In Dunbar's work, the same solemn Latin sentence closes each stanza, as in:

I that in heill wes and gladnes
Am trublit now with gret seiknes
And feblit with infirmitie:
Timor mortis conturbat me.
[Tr 'I that in health was and gladness
Am troubled now with great sickness
And enfeebled with infirmity:
The fear of death confounds me.']

Such verse is only one aspect of hybridization between two or more languages or varieties of a language, as between Greek and Latin, Latin and English, French and English, English and Scots, and conventional English and any English-based creole. My particular concern here, however, is interplay among European languages with long-established social, literary, and standard forms, as in a street notice that attracted my attention on the Seefeld-Strasse in Zurich:

*Ja Frauenzentrum s'il vous plaît – Mehr Anstand
in der Politik!*

Two points can be made here. First, translating such a slogan into English is possible, but utterly loses the macaronic effect: 'A Women's Centre, yes please – More decency and grace in politics!' Second, easily overlooked in such a fluent Swiss mixing of modern tongues and in my translation is a 'submerged' macaronic relationship formed long ago between Greek and Latin, illustrated here in German *Zentrum* and *Politik*, whose English equivalents are 'centre/center' and 'politics'. Both *Zentrum* and *centre/center* derive through Latin *centrum* from Greek *kéntron*, while *Politik* and *politics* derive through Latin *politica* from Greek *ta politika* 'the things of the city, affairs of state'.

Although the macaronic cannot survive in translation, the shared Greco-Latin inheritance may well do; indeed, in a serious sense one can say that *Zentrum* and *Politik* are not so much 'translated' into English as 'transposed', with appropriate adaptations. Such words as *Zentrum* and *centre/center* are however so deeply nativized within the languages concerned that – when viewed from language-specific points of view – they are not so much Latin and Greek words *per se* as Greco-Latinisms (suitably adapted in each case) in German, French, and English, etc. And some are so fully adapted that

many people might suppose them simply German, French, English, or whatever, and never think about Latin and Greek at all.

In a broad socio-historical sense, however, such linked usages as *Zentrum/centre/center* and *Politik/politics* are what Alan Kirkness has identified as *Euroclassisms* in contemporary European languages, in his article 'Eurolatin and English today' (ET49, Jan 97). What we therefore encounter in the Zurich notice is a dual phenomenon: a current inclination to hybridize on top of an ancient inclination to hybridize. Indeed, there may only ever have been the one inclination, unbroken through the centuries, setting certain words loose as 'internationalisms' that are more than simply the possessions of particular languages. Suitably adapted, they can go anywhere.

Universal, translinguistic, and whimsical

Struck by the *Frauenzentrum* sign, which was in fact the headline on a temporary political notice, I looked around for more. The result was a flood of signs and displays in just the one section of the street I had chosen. Many proved to be macaronic, just like the *Frauenzentrum* sign: for the full list of 31 items, ordered and numbered in unilingual and multilingual language groups, with glosses and notes, see Panel 1: Z1–Z31. A macaronic classic is [Z30] *Biona Reformhaus*, the name of a health food store. In it, the opening element of the first word is Greek *bio-* and the closing element probably *na*, the first syllable of Latin *natura*, and neither is Germanized, the form *Biona* being possible almost anywhere in the world. The second word, however, is a conventional German compound whose first element is of Latin/French origin, *reform* (Germanized as in *Reformkost* 'health food' and *Reformplan* 'plan for reform') while second is the vernacular German *Haus* 'house, building, premises, home'.

Switzerland is a multilingual country, in which German, French, Italian, and English are all in daily use. It is no surprise therefore to find such a range of signs in a major Swiss city already noted for its cosmopolitanism. But to find – in a well-delineated group of 31 signs in one part of only one street – no fewer than 21 variously bilingual and trilingual messages (68% of the sample) is food for serious thought – especially when, among the most massively hybrid constructions, one finds such formula-

tions as [Z25] *büro mondial brother center*, [Z26] *Felice B: Jersey Chic – Gross in Grossen Grössen* ('Great in big sizes': losing the euphony in English), and [Z28] *Patrice Berlin Design Fashion Atelier*.

This collection of names and messages felt like a flood because I was trying to catch them all at one time, something that no one would normally need, want, or expect to do. For most of us most of the time, signs like these are simply there, in the background, to be noted or ignored. Some are traditional and bland, like [Z14] *Apotheke – Farmacia – 100 Jahre Apotheke Mayer* ('Chemist – Pharmacy – 100 Years of Mayer the Chemist': all German save for the mildly out-of-place *Farmacia*, probably Italian), or [Z9] *Restaurant le Beaujolais*. Others have a certain quirkiness about them, like [Z7] *Second Hand Jasmin* (Is she really?) or [Z15] *Fiorella Blumengeschäft* (Italian 'Little Flower', a sort of woman's name, followed by 'Flower Shop' in German). Still others have set out to catch the eye and the pocket, like [Z10] *Spazio Immagine* ('Image Space': a dress shop) and [Z20] *Kleider-Börse second hand* ('Clothes-Exchange second hand'). The trendy infusion of English is massive (in this case, no fewer than 18 signs that are either all English or have English in them: 58% of the sample), but there is more going on with such names than simply Anglicization.

Unwilling to leave things at that, a week later in Uppsala in Sweden I undertook a second, larger survey, this time of 87 shops and services in or near the four streets flanking the block that housed my hotel: for the full list of items, ordered and numbered in unilingual and multilingual language groups, with glosses and notes, see Panel 2. The Swedish spread proved to be even more diverse than the initial Swiss sample. The two sets of languages involved are:

Zurich: 31 signs

2 German-only signs (0.6%), 5 English-only (16%), 2 Italian-only (0.6%), 1 French-only (0.3%), 3 German-and-French (1%), 3 German-and-Italian (1%), 7 German-and-English (23%), 1 English-and-French (0.3%), 1 German-French-English (0.3%), 1 French-English-German (0.3%), 1 English-Italian-French (0.3%), 1 German-English-French (0.3%), 1 German-French-Spanish (0.3%), 1 Greco-Latin-German (a special case: 0.3%), and 1 Anglo-Latin (a special case: 0.3%)
– German in 11 signs (35%)

- English in 11 signs (35%)
- French in 8 signs (26%)
- Italian in 4 signs (13%)

Uppsala: 86 signs

- 32 Swedish-only signs, 22 English-only, 4 French-only, 1 Turkish/Arabic, 8 Swedish-and-English combinations, 8 Swedish-and-French, 1 Swedish-and-Turkish/Arabic, 1 English-and-French, 2 English-and-Italian, 1 French-and-Italian, 1 French-Swedish-English, 1 Italian-Swedish-Turkish/Arabic, 1 Italian-Spanish-English, 1 Chinese-English-Swedish-French, 1 Turkish/Arabic-English-French-Swedish, 1 Swedish-French-English-Italian
- Swedish in 40 signs (46%)
 - English in 31 signs (36%)
 - French in 11 signs (13%)
 - Italian in 5 signs (0.6%)
 - Turkish/Arabic in 4 signs (0.46%)
 - Chinese in 1 sign (0.1%)

This second and larger exercise not only reinforced the pattern observed in the relatively small Zurich sample (local language prominent, then English, French, and Italian, in descending order), but also extended and enriched it. Uppsala’s population is much more varied these days than even ten years ago, because of an influx of immigrants, many of them refugees. The range of signs, however, only minimally reflects this diversity, because the language mix, as in Zurich, draws almost entirely on North Atlantic languages. Comparable patterns are likely in other such cities, the mix and statistical rating of languages varying according to history, geography, and current circumstance. Both sets of data seem to me to reinforce three key aspects of the growth and nature of street and store signs: the universal, the translinguistic, and the whimsical.

The universal aspect

Such bilingual juxtaposing as Zurich’s [Z19] *Farb-Copier* (German-English: ‘Colo(u)r Copier’, for a photocopying service) and Uppsala’s [U25] *Ungdomsmode* (Swedish-French: ‘Youth Fashion’, for a clothing shop) can be found throughout the world, including in English-speaking territories, and in many such formulations a proprietary name from one language is followed by a descriptive expression from another, as in [Z23] *Speich Copy Print AG* and [U64] *Liljefors Sport*. There can however be considerable complexity in bilin-

gual signs, as in [Z16] *Musikhaus Knupp: galerie vista nova* (German and Italian: ‘Knupp Music House/Centre: New Outlook Gallery’, where *Musik* is a Euroclassicism, *galerie* is a German Gallicism, and *nova* is Latin rather than Italian *nuova*) and [U65] *P-hus City* (‘P[arking]-House City’, a sign for an underground car park in which *hus* is the Swedish for ‘house, building’ and the English word *city* has a narrowed reference, meaning British ‘city centre’ or American ‘downtown’ and not the city at large. This usage may be compared with [U38] *CD City*, where the definition of *city* (originating in the US) is not conventionally urban at all but something like ‘shop where you can get the widest range (of a particular commodity)’, in this case CDs.

Key international words occur regularly in many of the listed multilingual signs. Such words can come from any language, as with English *bar, city, copier, park(ing), sport*, French *boutique, cafe, mode, restaurant*, Italian *espresso, pizza, vista*, and Turkish *felafel, kebab*. In a few years’ time, such words are unlikely to be seen as foreign in any major urban environment (if indeed this isn’t already the case), and their ethnocultural origins will hardly signify, in much the same way as *Zentrum/centre* and *Politik/politics*. Such mixing and matching in [Z19] *Farb-Copier* and [U25] *Ungdomsmode* can also nowadays be found wherever there are concentrations of shops, malls, arcades, supermarkets, service areas, hotels, cafes, pubs, and the like – including very notably international airports.

Much more unpredictable mixing takes place in, for example, [U87] *Restaurang Baren Baren Casino* (‘Restaurant the Bar the Bar Casino’), which brings together the Swedish spelling of French *restaurant* with English *bar* repeated (each time with the Swedish definite-article suffix *-en* attached), and closing with Italian *casino*: an extreme outcome of physical and cultural mingling and economic globalization. While such creativity often makes heavy use of English, it is neither English-inspired nor English-dependent. It is probably as old as Ur of the Chaldees, and any languages will serve, depending on geography and history.

The translinguistic aspect

In signs and names like these, the boundaries of language are porous, allowing for adaptations in phonology, orthography, grammar, morphology, word-formation, semantics, and

Shop signs in the Seefeld-Strasse, Zurich, Switzerland

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An informal thematic survey made in May 1999

NOTES

1 The print style of the specimens follows the originals as closely as possible.

2 Translations and notes are provided where necessary in square brackets.

3 There are 31 signs in all in the survey:

2 German-only signs, 4 English-only, 1 French-only, 2 Italian-only, 3 German-and-French, 3 German-and-Italian, 7 German-and-English, 2 English-and-French, and 7 trilingual signs drawing on all of the above.

Unilingual signs

German only

- Z1 Conditorei-Backerei ['Cake Shop-Bakery': NB with 'C', not 'Konditorei']
Z2 nauer textil reinigung ['Nauer: textile cleaning': NB no initial capital letters and not a solid but an open-compound layout]

English only

- Z3 1 City-Video [Probably a reversal of 'Video City', where *city* would imply 'shop': cf. U38 CD City]
Z4 2 English Film: Mail and Direct Sale
Z5 3 Genius: the Representation Company
Z6 4 Production: Everything for your hair and you

French only

- Z7 1 Restaurant Le Beaujolais

Italian only

- Z8 1 Giancarlo DONNA ['John Charles: LADY': dress shop]
Z9 2 Spazio Immagine ['ImageSpace': dress shop]

Bilingual signs

German and French

- Z10 1 Duvets-Reinigung – Vorhangatelier – Polsteratelier ['Duvet Cleaning – Curtain Studio – Cushion Studio']
Z11 2 Freytag: Cafe – Conditorei – Confiserie ['Friday (*Freitag*) as a family name: Cafe – Cake Shop – Sweet shop/Candy Store']
Z12 3 Trottinette Kinderboutique ['Little-Trotter Children's Boutique', in which a German word is given a French feminine diminutive suffix]

German and Italian

- Z13 1 Apotheke – Farmacia – 100 Jahre Apotheke Mayer ['Chemist's – Pharmacy-- Mayer, for 100 Years a Chemist': cf. *apothecary*]

- Z14 2 Fiorella: Blumengeschäft ['Little Flower (woman's name): Florist']

- Z15 3 Musikhaus Knupp: galerie vista nova ['Knupp Music House/Centre: New Outlook Gallery: NB Latin *nova*, not *nouva*]

German and English

- Z16 1 Antiquariat: Bücher, Schallplatten, CDs ['Antiquarian bookshop: Books, Records ("sound-plates"), CDs']
Z17 2 Cleaning Shop – 2 Stunden Reinigung ['– 2 Hour Cleaning']
Z18 3 Farb-copier – Plan-Plot ['Colo(u)r-copier – Plan-Plot']
Z19 4 Kleider-Borse second hand ['Clothes-Exchange –']
Z20 5 Med. trainingstherapie Seefeld ['Lakefield Medical Training Therapy']
Z21 6 Seefeld Bar: Gartenwirtschaft ['Lakefield Bar: Garden Area']
Z22 7 Speich Copy Print AG ['Speich (name) – Ltd.']

English and French

- Z23 1 Second Season Lingerie checkout
Z24 5 Second-Hand Jasmin, repeated underneath as 'Second-Hand Jasmine': English and French versions of the same Middle-Eastern woman's name

Trilingual signs

- Z25 1 Büro mondial brothercenter [German-French-General English-American English]
Z26 2 Felice B: Jersey Chic – Gross in Grossen Grössen [French name-English-French-German catchphrase: 'Great in Big Sizes']
Z27 3 Hairdresser Secchi Coiffure [English-Italian (a name)-French]
Z28 5 Patrice Berlin Design Fashion Atelier [Franco-German name(s)-English (with 'Fashion Design' reversed)-French]
Z29 6 Schneiderin – Atelier Carmen ['Tailoress – Studio Carmen': German-French-Spanish (a name)]

Multilingual neologistic signs

- Z30 1 Biona Reformhaus ['?Bio-na(ture) Reform House' (Greek, Latin, and German: a health food store)]
Z31 2 FITarium [a fitness centre/center: a blend of English *fit* ('healthy', etc.) and the suffix in e.g. Latin *herbarium*, meaning something like 'place for']

semiotics. Such signs and names contribute to long-term adoption and adaptation, as in the window-filling string [U86] *Kebab House – Cheese Meal – Student Rabatt – Mjuk Glass*, where *kebab* is Turkish, *house*, *cheese*, and *meal* are English, *student* is Swedish and English, *rabatt* is the Swedish for ‘discount’ (but compare French *rabattre*, English *rebate*), and *glass* is not ‘glass’ at all but a Swedish orthographic adaptation of French *glace* ‘ice cream’.

Such strings of phrases are dazzlingly multilingual, but equally significant (though more subdued) are such etymologically related forms as French *musique*, English *music*, German *Musik*, Italian *musico* – all through Latin from Greek *he mousiké tekhné* ‘the craft of the Muses’. Just above, I referred to *Musik* as a Euroclassicism in German, but there is more to the matter than that. Lurking in or ‘behind’ such Euroclassical cognates is an entity without a precise canonical form or even meaning, which I have called the ‘translinguistic word’ – see Panel 2 (and cf. the recent wide media use of the word *transnational*). The same ‘word’ can have a variety of forms in different languages, as for example an item in the data which has roughly one phonological and three orthographic forms: compare [Z28] *Patrice Berlin Design Fashion Atelier* and [U64] *Fotoateljé*. French *atelier* (‘workshop, studio’) is the etymon for both, with an initial capital as a German noun (*Atelier*) and an adapted ending in written Swedish (*ateljé*) that seeks to make the French pronunciation more accessible to Swedes.

Such words are legitimately classified as

Galicisms in German and Swedish respectively, which means that they are fully naturalized in each case while having a clear (and shared) origin elsewhere. By their very existence in these non-French settings, however, these items cause their etymon to transcend its own language: thus, *pizza* is manifestly Italian both in current terms and in origin, but Italian has become only one of the languages in which it commonly occurs (with due adaptations) and to which it therefore ‘belongs’ – though still recognizably an Italianism. Comparably, there is a close match between the *Zentrum* in Zurich’s *Frauenzentrum* and the *centrum* in [U9] *H-Centrum*, in which the *H* is short for Swedish *Hantverk* (‘Handicraft’). (The other day I noticed in Cambridge some vitamin-supplement tablets produced by a presumably international company called *Centrum*: Latinity still packs a punch, but its many straight and adapted words in current circulation nowadays are all translinguistic, and may have moved their meanings far from the Latin original, as with *video* ‘I see’ and *audio* ‘I hear’.)

When such forms as *bureau/Büro*, *music/Musik*, *photo/foto*, and *falafel/felafel* turn up with minimal differences in a range of languages, they may also be called ‘internationalisms’: items without a precise home any more, either geographically or linguistically – regardless of their ultimate sources and of any on-going associations they may have with aspects of life in one place or culture. *Hamburger* for example does not generally refer to someone or something from the city of *Hamburg* in Germany; it is not even viewed worldwide as a Germanism, is in



Some signs in Uppsala: 1

effect an Americanism that has been further clipped into *burger* – whence the novel compounds *baconburger*, *nutburger*, etc., arising out of a re-interpretation of the *ham* element as referring to the meat of the pig (whereas the original hamburgers contained minced/ground Hamburg steak, a fact which did not prevent the creation of the item *beefburger*).

Among the many other words that are now both internationalisms and translinguistic are *disc/disk*, *copy*, *duvet*, *boutique*, *bar*, *mode*, *kebab*, and *sushi*. They may or may not change their pronunciations and orthographies or stretch their meanings as they merge into yet another language, but they do easily form such macaronic unions as *copy mode*, *sushi bar*, [Z11] *Duvets-Reinigung* (German: ‘Duvet cleaning’) and [U73] *Spel-Butik* (Swedish: ‘Gaming Shop’). Importantly, they can be so naturalized into a language as to lose entirely their macaronic quality for the native speaker (though not for alien observers, who may be alarmed or charmed by what they discover in their travels).

The whimsical aspect

The phrasings and juxtapositions of street and store signs are often witty, with a capacity for making social points and puns or for cracking in-group jokes, in ways that resemble advertisements and headlines. Consider the English-Latin gamesmanship in [Z31] *FITarium*, a classy

kind of place to work out in, which uses capital letters to mark off the key English element from its Latin suffix. Or consider the English-Swedish combination in [U56] *DIG*IT textiltryckeri*, which uses a star to get from the computational and Latinate *digit* to the *dig it* of American slang, suggesting simultaneously that textile printing is up-to-the-minute and fun.

Interanto

The artificial language Esperanto was first proposed for international use by the Polish oculist Ludwig Lazarus Zamenhof in the 1880s. The name derives from Latin *sperare* (‘to hope’), and the pseudonym that Zamenhof used in 1887 for his book on the subject was *Doktoro Esperanto* (‘Doctor Hoper’). By and large, the structure and vocabulary of Esperanto derives from various European languages, as a result of which it is European in its vocabulary and has been referred to (not necessarily adversely) as a planned pidgin of the Romance and German languages, with some Greek and Slavic thrown in.

Esperanto is therefore a hybrid that adopts and adapts lexical material from many sources, as in the specimen sentences *Rosas estas floroj* (‘Roses are flowers’: all three words drawn from Latin) and *La besto estis kato* (‘The animal was a cat’: a sentence that brings Germanic and Romance together much as German and French came together in the *Frauenzentrum* sign).



Some signs in Uppsala: 2

Although Esperanto has not become the world's key international auxiliary language, there has been metaphoric value in the name, as in: 'Latin, the Esperanto of the Middle Ages' (*Westminster Gazette*, 1905) and 'the special esperanto of cine-club experts' (*Times Literary Supplement*, 1958). In addition, because of the internationality and motivation of Esperanto, adaptations of the word have been used from time to time for multinational, exotic, and often humorous purposes, as in: *Eurospeak Desperanto*, the alleged patois of EU bureaucrats; *Obscuranto*, a joke name for Spoken EFL (as used by John Ellison Kahn in 1994); and *Ozperanto*, or Esperanto as it is used in Australia.

In addition, the extracted suffix *-anto* has been put to work in recent times to name kinds of international usage (good or bad, imaginary or real, serious or facetious), as in: *Euranto*, the name of a system of phonetically-spelt English proposed in the 1970s by S. S. Eustace as the auxiliary language of the European Community; *Logoranto*, a name proposed mock-seriously by the British humorist Miles Kington (in the article 'Linguistics in my laundry', *The Independent*, 7 July 1988) for the logograms or icons displayed at airports, in PCs, etc.; and *Europanto*, a name proposed in the 1990s for an EU-wide patois by Diego Marani, a translator for the European Council of Ministers in Brussels. As he puts it: 'No es Englando, no est Germano, no est Espana, no est keine known lingua aber Du Understande!' (cited in *Language International* 10.6, 1998:48).

In line with this formative pattern, I have begun to think of the world's multilingual and multicultural signs as an *Interanto*, because of their internationalism and the interplay of their elements, because of the communicative success they achieve ('Aber Du Understande!'), and because of that element of whimsicality. A suffix such as *-anto*, which combines a serious historical theme with grace-notes of (often wry) humour, may be appropriate. The phenomenon to which the word can be applied would appear to be one of the most international forms of language ever created. *Interanto* is widespread, functional, on occasion serious, on occasion humorous, and belongs to everybody, but is hardly a tool of linguistic imperialism or Big Brother in business, and nobody would dream of fighting to the death for it – or against it. Nor does anybody regulate or teach it, yet it flourishes like the green bay tree.

Nature and characteristics

Nigel Ross has drawn our attention to the presence, at least in Milan, of signs that contain a great deal of 'international' – that is to say, 'English' – usage. It is, however, worth taking a close look at the context in which this English occurs. Ross makes it clear that English words and phrases occur within essentially Italian social and commercial contexts; what his text does not emphasize, but is evident from the accompanying photographs, is that the context is often macaronic. English and Italian co-occur in such combinations as *Green Garden Ristorante Pizzeria*, *Smart Set Parucchiere per Signora*, and *Gadget's per l'APPUNTO*.

This juxtaposition is comparable to what I found in Zurich and Uppsala, save that in the Swiss and Swedish contexts English is only one of the available ingredients. The macaronic game can survive without it, as in [Z13] *Trottinette Kinderboutique* (German-French), [U77] *Falafel Gatakok* (Turkish/Arabic-Swedish: 'Pepper Street-Kitchen') and [U83] *Pinocchio: Pizza – Sallader – Kebab* (Italian twice, then Swedish, then Turkish/Arabic). *Interanto* has no favourites. Even the few specimens gathered here amply demonstrate the migration of other mixes – earlier, like Latin and Greek, more distant, like Turkish and Arabic – into novel situations and combinations. For example:

● Words from Classical Greek

These are appropriately adapted morphologically, phonologically, and orthographically, either through Latin or by long association with their host languages, or both. They are commonplace and indeed translinguistic and internationalized, as with *apothéké* ('a place to put things, a storehouse') and *pharmakeía* ('the practice of the druggist') in their German and Italian avatars *Apotheke* and *Farmacia* [Z14].

● Words from Classical Latin

These are often visually the same as in the original language, as with *video* and *genius* in [Z3] *City-Video* and [Z5] *Genius: the representation company*. Such words may well be currently perceived as English, but today's *genius* is at least visually identical to a Latin word that was originally applied to a presiding guardian spirit (the *genius loci* or 'spirit of a place') while in Latin *video* means 'I see', just as *audio* means 'I hear' and *credo* means 'I believe'. They are nowadays essentially translinguistic and internationalized.

● *Greco-Latin internationalisms*

Examples of combination are [U12] *Klipp Punkten* and [U19] *STURE FOTO*. The first phrase, translating as ‘the clip point’, is a cheeky label for a hair-dressing salon; here, *klipp* is cognate with English ‘clip’ and *punkt* with Anglo-French ‘point’, both *punkt* and *point* deriving ultimately from Latin *punctum* (whose meaning English dictionaries can only give in ultimately circular fashion as ‘point’). In the second phrase, a local personal name *Sture* is combined with *Foto*, the Swedish graphic version of the first element in Greco-Latin *photographia* ‘writing with light’ and *photosynthesis* ‘synthesis through light’. Anglophones coming across such words as *foto/photo*, *genius/génie*, and *punkt/point* in non-Anglophone cities may be forgiven (just) for assuming that they are a kind of English – true up to a point, but only in the sense that English is just one of the languages that incarnate these translinguistic forms.

Conclusion

At the end of the analysis, the two features that have struck me most forcibly are creativity and interplay. Certainly many of the shop names are unilingual, traditional, local, and *dull* – and in a sense therefore they are not part of the discussion (although they must be part of the collection). Some show no more verve and imagination than any neighbourhood service needs: a pharmacy is a pharmacy is a pharmacy. And even when English gets in on the act, the world doesn’t necessarily shake, as with [Z18] *Cleaning Shop – 2 Stunden Reinigung* (‘Cleaning

Shop – 2 Hour Cleaning’) and [U61] *Celsiustech Systems*, which may be technologically hip and have a tidy look, but doesn’t really *sing*.

Yet, in both locales, even where the multilingualism is minimal, there are intriguing touches, such as the shop with the fully German name [Z3] *nauer textil reinigung* (‘Nauer: Textile Cleaning’) which goes entirely lowercase, flouting the conventions of initial capital letters and of compounds written as one word. Or the hatter’s shop whose name [U4] *Engelska HATT* (‘English HATS’) uses a contrast between lower and upper case so that the hats are more significant than their place of origin. And there is cosy intimacy (however clichéd) in the all-English [Z6] *Production: Everything for your hair and you*.

I was surprised at first by the fewness of the German-only signs in my chosen section of the Seefeld-Strasse in Zurich: 2 out of 31 such signs (under 1% of the sample) as compared with central Uppsala’s 32 Swedish-only signs out of 87 (37%). However, the presence of German in 18 multilingual Zurich signs makes a total of 20 German-using signs (65%), which compares well with the overall 53 Swedish-using signs in Uppsala (61%). The figures for English-only signs are not sky-high in Zurich at 5 (16%) and in Uppsala at 23 (26%), but the presence of English in 13 bi- and multilingual Zurich signs makes a total of 18 English-using signs out of 31 (58% of the sample) and in 16 bi- and multilingual Uppsala signs makes a total of 39 English-using signs out of 87 (45%). These are high figures: just over half in Zurich and just under half in Uppsala.

Shop signs in central Uppsala, Sweden:

2

A representative thematic sample (June 1999)

NOTES

- 1 The print style of the specimens follows the originals as closely as possible.
- 2 Translations and notes are provided where necessary in square brackets.
- 3 There are 86 signs in all in the survey: 32 Swedish-only, 22 English-only, 4 French-only, 1 Turkish/Arabic, 8 Swedish-and-English combinations, 8 Swedish-and-French, 1 Swedish-and-Turkish/Arabic, 1 English-and-French, 2 English-and-Italian, 1 French-and-Italian, 1 French-Swedish-English, 1 Italian-Swedish-Turkish/Arabic, 1 Italian-Spanish-English, 1 Chinese-English-Swedish-French,


- 1 Turkish/Arabic-English-French-Swedish,
- 1 Swedish-French-English-Italian.

Unilingual signs

Swedish

- U1 BERGSTRÖMS UR [Bergstrom’s ‘Hour/Pocketwatch’]
- U2 BLOMMOR [‘Blooms’ = flowers]
- U3 FOLKSAM [‘Folk-Together’: insurance company]
- U4 Engelska HATT [‘English Hat’]
- U5 Gardiner [‘Curtains/Drapery’: note *-er* plural,



- not the English family name]
- U6 Gardin Hellberg ['Curtain/Drapery Hellberg (name)]
- U7 GARN Handarbeten ['TheYARN Handicraft']
- U8 GULDSMED ['goldsmith']
- U9 H-CENTRUM [H = Hantverk: 'Handicraft Centre']
- U10 HUDVÅRD ['Skin Care']
- U11 KEMTVÄTT ['Dry Cleaners']
- U12 KLIPP PUNKTEN ['Clip Point/Cutting Place': Hairdresser's]
- U13 LÅSSMED ['Locksmith']
- U14 MOLLBRINKS KONST [the name Mollbrinks and 'Art']
- U15 RAMVERKSTAD ['Picture Framing Workshop']
- U16 Svalan Godis ['Swallow (= the bird) Goodies' (= Bulk Candy)]
- U17 SKOMAKARE ['Shoe-Maker']
- U18 SKRÄDDERI ['Tailor']
- U19 STURE FOTO [the name Sture and 'photo']
- U20 Trafikskola ['Driving School']
- U21 Tryckeri Fotosättning [Printing Phototypesetting]
- U22 WAHLQVISTmattor [Wahlqvist 'Carpets']
- U23 Underkläder ['Underwear']
- U24 S:T PERS KROG ['St Peters' Bar']
- U25 Ungdomsmode ['Youth Fashion': a clothing shop]
- U26 upsala farg ['Uppsala paint': note city name with one *p*: paint shop]
- U27 Ving ['Wing', a travel agency]
- U28 BERGKVIST DIN OPTIKER [Bergkvist 'your optician']
GLASÖGON ['glass eyes']
KONTAKTLINSER ['contact lenses']
- U29 DIREKT OPTIK [Latinized Swedish]
- U30 Syn(°)punkten ['the Sight Point', i.e. point of view: a chain of opticians]
- U31 Reklam & Katalogtryck ['Advertising and Catalogue Printing']
- U32 Nordiska Afrika Institutet ['The Nordic Africa Institute']
- English**
- U33 1 Aerobics Global [with inverted word order and a Greco-Latin mix]
- U34 2 Allradio Euronics [running *all* and *radio* together, *Euronics* = *Europe Electronics*]
- U35 3 Burger King [an international chain originating in the US]
- U36 4 McDonald's [American-Scottish: an international chain originating in the US]
- U37 5 Colour Kitchen: Bar and Cafe [where *café* is originally French, and British spelling of *colour*]
- U38 6 CD City [where *city* has a secondary and especially American meaning of 'shop where you can get the widest range': cf. U42, U64, Z3]
- U39 7 EIS European Information System [computers, etc.]
- U40 8 Electrolux Home
- U41 9 Flash [no details recorded]
- U42 10 ICA City [where ICA stands for a retailers' co-operative]
- U43 11 INFOTEK [blend *information* and *technology*, with *k* for *ch*, the words originating in Latin and Greek respectively.]
- U44 12 INTERSPORT: Shops for Winners [a chain store]
- U45 13 Jack and Jones authorized dealer [jeans and youth clothing]
- U46 14 Joy [no details recorded]
- U47 15 Kodak Image Center [US spelling]
- U48 16 Orient Palace: Pripps [where the first words name a Chinese restaurant, and Pripps identifies a Swedish brewery]
- U49 17  CARPARK [where P = parking (an international sign)]
- U50 18 Profdoc [no details recorded]
- U51 19 Rock's Records
- U52 20 Santa Monica Dine and Drink: Bar–Dinner–Snacks–Sandwiches–Beer
- U53 21 Telelogic [communications and computers: but both *tele-* and *logic* ultimately Greek]
- U54 22 The Body Shop [international chain originating in the UK]
- French**
- U55 1 Nathalie [a dress shop]
- U56 2 Boutique Kaiser [Kaiser Boutique, combining a German name and a French word [dress shop: cf. U66 below]]
- U57 3 Frisör [Swedified, from *friseur*, 'hairdresser']
- U58 4 AXARA PARIS [dress shop: 'Axara' not known]
- Turkish/Arabic**
- U59 1 Ambessa Felafel
- Bilingual signs**
- Swedish and English**
- U60 1 Celsiustech Systems
- U61 2 DIG*IT Textiltryckeri
- U62 3 KICK'S KOSMETIKKEDJAN ['Kick's Cosmetic Chain']
- U63 4 Liljefors Sport [Liljefors: a family name]

- U64 5 P-hus City ['P-House City', where P is the international sign for 'Parking' and City 'city centre, downtown']
- U65 6 Right Tobak ['Right Tobacco']
- U66 7 World Electronic
REPARERAR DIN TV, VIDEO OCH
VIDEOKAMERA ['... repairs your TV,
video, and video-camera']
- U67 8 Resman – Res med Resman – Fritids
Resor– Royal Tours ['Travel-Man –
Travel with Travel-Man– Leisure-Time
Travel...': travel agency]

Swedish and French

- U68 1 DAMMODE ['Women's Fashion': a
dress shop]
- U69 2 Villa Wellins Mode [Woman's name
and 'Fashion': dress shop]
- U70 3 Fotoateljé ['Photo Studio', from *atelier*
cf. Panel 1]
- U71 4 Salong Finess [From *Salon Finesse*: a
dress shop]
- U72 5 Spel-Butik ['Gaming Shop/Boutique']
- U73 6 Hotel Radisson Gillet [*Hotel* and
Radisson from French, Gillet Swedish,
'the banquet, guild']
- U74 7 Hotel Uplandia [*Hotel* from French
and *Uplandia* a Latinization of the
name of a Swedish province]
- U75 8 Café: Bocker– Skivor– Papper: Gospel
Hornan ['Cafe: Books – Records
'Slices') – Paper: Gospel Corner']

Swedish and Turkish/Arabic

- U76 1 FALAFEL GATUKÖK ['Pepper Street-
Kitchen']

English and French

- U77 1 East West United World Bistro

**English and Italian (the latter family names
only)**

- U78 1 Fellini's Restaurant and Bar
- U79 2 Ice Cream PANINI Express Shop

French and Italian

- U80 1 RIFIFI Pastoria & Café

Trilingual signs

French, Swedish, and English

- U81 1 Restaurang ÅBRO Bar and Disco
[ÅBRO the name of a brewery]

Italian, Swedish, and Turkish/Arabic

- U82 1 PINOCCHIO: Pizza–Sallader– Kebab

Italian, Spanish, English

- U83 1 Cafeteria Pizzeria [*Cafeteria* through
American English from American
Spanish and *pizzeria* Italian]

Quadrilingual signs

Chinese, English, Swedish, French

- U84 1 NANYANG MARKET– KINAFFÄR
[*Nanyang* a place in China; *Kinaaffär*
Swedish for 'China Store'; (*affär* from
French *affaire* 'business')]

Turkish/Arabic, English, French, Swedish

- U85 1 KEBAB HOUSE: CHEESE MEAL –
STUDENT RABATT – MJUK GLASS –
Prova Kebab House Menyer [Turkish
and English *Kebab House*, English
cheese meal, English and Swedish
student rabatt ('discount', cf. '*rebate*'),
and Swedish *mjuk glass*, where *mjuk*
is 'milk' but *glass* is 'soft ice-cream',
from French *glace*; *prova* is Swedish
for 'try' and *menyer* is the Swedish
plural of French-derived *menu*]

Swedish, French, English, Italian

- U86 1 Restaurang Baren Baren Casino
['Restaurant the Bar the Bar Casino',
bringing together the Swedish
spelling of French *restaurant* with the
English word *bar* (twice, with the
Swedish definite-article suffix *-en*
attached), and Italian *casino*]

This suggests that while Nigel Ross has a point about the strength of English as an international language of signs I may also have a point about the vigour of macaronic usage. At the turn of the millennium, multilingualism in street and store signs appears to be flourishing, even if English does continue to get a rather generous slice of the pie. ■

Note

- 1 The statements about *macaronic* and *Esperanto*

adapt and extend material in the entries on these subjects in *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*, 1992.

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