

# **Esperanto as an interdisciplinary field of transnational innovation**

## *Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) - Erasmus+*

Cooperating partner universities and country: Université de Tours (France), Universidad de Sevilla (Spain), Universität Bamberg (Germany), Università degli Studi di Parma (Italy), Universiteit van Amsterdam (Netherlands), Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Istanbul (Turkey), Universiteit Gent (Belgium), Universitatea din București (Romania).

This BIP focuses on Esperanto, and aims to introduce students to the theoretical issues of constructed languages and linguistic justice, and to provide inspiration for reflection and research on the example of the historical experience of the Esperanto community of practice.

Transnational studies, which have brought together a wide range of perspectives from the social sciences, are based on bi- or plurilateral exchanges between nations in which nationality and representativeness remain the key factors. However, the question of language has rarely been at the centre of attention in these studies. What languages are the vehicle for these transnational interactions and do they have the potential to shape a shared culture? In the field of transnational studies, Esperanto was never an object of studies before, despite the fact that living the Esperanto experience implies living a transnational reality independent of any particular nation. This community of speakers develops its own shared cultural space through diversity, above and beyond the nations. The long-term experience of Esperanto shows that bottom up relationships have been successfully established, based on free choice of language and linguistic and cultural equality between participants.

The BIP opens up new horizons for students, both in terms of rethinking their research on the basis of transnational communication on an equal footing and in terms of exploring new areas of study and research in the historical and anthropological corpus of Esperanto.

The BIP consists of two parts:

- a distance learning phase (January to May)
- a face-to-face phase (June 1 to 5, 2026 in Tours)

During the distance learning phase, students will follow :

- an introduction to Esperanto (1h30 per week / 12 weeks)
- 6 lectures on the major themes explored during the BIP

During the face-to-face phase in Tours (France), students will take part in :

- lectures on the various subject areas
- group work and presentations in the form of seminars

The first part provides an introduction to the language through an online course, so that participants can develop an understanding of original documents that attest to the unique functionalities involved in this communication process.

The second part aims to bring together students from different disciplines to observe this phenomenon in practice on concrete examples and to conceive, from their disciplinary perspective, practical applications that will enable transnational exchanges to implement inclusive communication mechanisms. This phase will be organised at the University of Tours.

## **ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF TOURS**

The workshop will take place during the first week of June at the Faculté Lettres et Langues (Literature, Linguistics and Languages Faculty) of the University of Tours.

Location: *Faculté Lettres et Langues, 3 rue des Tanneurs, 37000 Tours, France.*

The University of Tours was officially founded as a university in 1970, but the University of Tours as we know it today is the heir to an active center of learning that has existed since Gallo-Roman times. Nowadays, with 14 faculties and institutes, it is a multi-disciplinary university with 31700 students, 1490 teachers and 34 research laboratories.

The city of Tours is also easy to get to. Tours is 240 kilometers from Paris (where two major international airports are located). The city of Tours is accessible from Paris by high-speed train (journey time is generally between 1h and 1h30). The Faculty, where the intensive BIP week will take place, can be reached from the train station in around 10 minutes by tram.

The *Faculté Lettres et Langues* is also part of the pedestrian historic center of Tours, and is located right on the banks of the Loire River. The Loire Valley itself is a Unesco World Heritage Site. A range of cultural activities will be offered to students, outside the classroom.

## **BIP TARGET AUDIENCE**

The BIP has an interdisciplinary and international dimension, and therefore aims to highlight the diversity of disciplines and theoretical approaches, as well as the diversity of countries, both for teachers and students. For this reason, a limited number of students will be accepted from each partner university, in order to diversify the participants' countries of origin.

The BIP is also open to students from other universities (as long as they are part of the Erasmus scheme), even if their university is not one of the BIP partner universities. It includes other higher education institutions holding an ECHE. This openness is precisely designed to encourage diversity of geographical origin and/or diversity of the disciplines involved.

The programme is open to all students in any field of the humanities and social sciences, from undergraduate to master and doctoral levels, as well as to staff members wishing to open up their research themes to certain aspects of transnational innovation by means of Esperanto.

The course will be taught in English. However instructors may use well-known multilingual strategies such as *lingua receptiva*, consecutive interpretation by the group, code-switching whenever necessary. Since the basic language of instruction will be English, students must demonstrate a certain level of proficiency, at least B1. During the workshops, Esperanto will be used progressively, depending on the level of linguistic progress of the participants.

The BIP does not presuppose any particular knowledge of Esperanto or Esperanto-related subjects. Students with no knowledge of Esperanto are therefore invited to take part in the BIP, during which they will receive initial training in the language (distance learning). This training will give them easier access to the documents relating to the various aspects associated with Esperanto, which will be developed in the online courses and during the intensive week.

Should students already have a sufficient command of Esperanto, we invite them to mention this in their letter of application (in this case, a remote interview will be offered in January to determine whether they can be exempted from the introductory language phase).

## **ECTS VALIDATION**

Students taking part in the BIP will validate their involvement in the program by completing various assignments. Students who successfully complete the BIP program are awarded 6 ECTS credits. These can be directly allocated to courses already identified (depending on the partner universities), or will be subject to specific validation (within each university).

## **FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

This BIP is part of the Erasmus program. Financial support (for travel and accommodation) is provided by the student's home university, as part of a BIP Erasmus student mobility program. A certain number of students at partner universities have already agreed to mobility, so all you have to do is apply to join the scheme. For students from outside partner universities, a specific procedure must be carried out with the Erasmus office of their home university.

## **CALENDAR**

- applications and cover letters are accepted until November 15, 2026
- students selected to take part in the BIP will be notified in December
- the distance learning phase runs from January to May 2026
- the intensive week in Tours will take place from June 1 to 5, 2026

## APPLICATION PROCEDURE

To determine which students have been accepted to take part in the BIP, students are asked to submit a cover letter (between 10 and 20 lines) explaining their interest in the BIP theme. The letter must be sent to the e-mail address of the person in charge at the university of affiliation:

- Universiteit van Amsterdam: Federico Gobbo < [f.gobbo@uva.nl](mailto:f.gobbo@uva.nl) >
- Universität Bamberg: Martin Haase < [martin.haase@uni-bamberg.de](mailto:martin.haase@uni-bamberg.de) >
- Universitatea din București: Ecaterina Lung < [ecaterina.lung@istorie.unibuc.ro](mailto:ecaterina.lung@istorie.unibuc.ro) >
- Universiteit Gent: Torsten Leuschner < [Torsten.Leuschner@ugent.be](mailto:Torsten.Leuschner@ugent.be) >
- Boğaziçi Üniversitesi İstanbul: Başak Aray < [basak.aray@bogazici.edu.tr](mailto:basak.aray@bogazici.edu.tr) >
- Università degli Studi di Parma: Davide Astori < [davide.astori@unipr.it](mailto:davide.astori@unipr.it) >
- Universidad de Sevilla: David Galvez Ruiz < [davidgalvez@us.es](mailto:davidgalvez@us.es) >
- University of Tours: Philippe Planchon < [philippe.planchon@univ-tours.fr](mailto:philippe.planchon@univ-tours.fr) >

Students who do not belong to a partner university are advised to contact the BIP coordinator at the University of Tours directly: < [philippe.planchon@univ-tours.fr](mailto:philippe.planchon@univ-tours.fr) >

## COURSE FORMAT

The distance learning phase consists of two modules: the first phase includes an 18-hours language introduction to Esperanto based on active learning strategy, while the second one consists of a series of 6 one-hour online courses providing an introduction to Esperanto studies from different disciplinary perspectives.

The online language course will be led by Dennis Keefe, an acknowledged specialist in teaching Esperanto in a multilingual context. He has taught at HEC Paris and Nanking University. He is the author of an original method called the Valencia method, named after the place where it was implemented.

The 6 online lectures will be presented by professors and invited experts from all member universities of the consortium. The programme will cover the following subjects:

1. Introduction to the course
2. Esperanto in the world of linguistics (Philippe Planchon)
3. Esperanto as a constructed historical object (Pascal Dubourg Glatigny)
4. Sociolinguistics of Esperanto (Federico Gobbo)
5. The geography of Esperanto (Denis Eckert)
6. Philosophical background of constructed languages (Başak Aray)

During the online courses, students will take an active part, and sufficient time will be set aside for their questions and requests for clarification. In addition, participants will take part in two online seminars, during which they will be divided into groups of 4 or 5, under the supervision of a professor who will support the preparation of the group work. Each group will choose a specific focus that it will explore during both the remote and on-site phases.

For their workshop project, the students can generate their own ideas or choose from a catalogue of projects proposed by the teachers. For example:

- Decolonizing discourses in the history of Esperanto
- Women and Esperanto, a language or social issue?
- Comparison between Esperanto and other languages
- Ways of translating into / from / through Esperanto
- How can Esperanto help improve language learning?

The online phase will be followed by a 5-day workshop (7 days including travel) bringing the students and part of the instructors together in person. During the workshop, the students and professors will discuss seminal theories in the field. Further language practice will take place. Parallel to the lectures, the groups of 4 or 5 students, under the supervision of the professors, will investigate the question they selected during the virtual phase. They will present their research, new insights and critical views during plenary sessions, which will give rise to discussions with all the participants.

At the end of the on-site phase, the students will submit a short paper on their experience, highlighting how the knowledge gained has led them to rethink this research question and the extent to which the global dimension of the transnational experience of Esperanto provides them with new lines of reflection and theoretical requirements.

|                                          |                              |
|------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Total of hours guided by the professors: | - Language course 18 hours   |
|                                          | - On-line lectures 7 ½ hours |
|                                          | - On-line workshops 3 hours  |
|                                          | - Workshop at Tours 32 hours |

### Examination

|                                                                                                                        |      |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| Participation in the online language course                                                                            | 10 % |
| Participation in all online lectures                                                                                   | 10 % |
| Participation in the workshop                                                                                          | 10 % |
| Preparation and presentation of a project in groups of 4 to 5 students from different universities                     | 20 % |
| Individual paper connecting theoretical issues with a text discussed in the course or with their own research interest | 30 % |
| Language examination                                                                                                   | 20 % |

## SUMMARY OF COURSES

Pascal Dubourg Glatigny (Centre Alexandre Koyré, CNRS, EHESS)

*140 years of Esperanto, a historic achievement*

While the origin of the language takes us back to the issues of the individual language creation and the general context of *conlangs*, Esperanto has become a global social experiment with all its cultural and political components. Based on a few examples from different periods, continents and social backgrounds, we will illustrate the richness and originality of Esperanto sources in questioning current issues in many disciplines.

Torsten Leuschner (Ghent University):

*The International Language Question before the First World War*

The topic of this module is the debate in the years before 1914 about the necessity and/or usefulness of Esperanto or some other planned language as a means of international communication. We will consider how this issue was approached within different movements and sociocultural milieux and who the authors were who contributed to the debate – from esperantists, socialists, anarchists, pacifists and trade unionists to economists, monists, philosophers of language and academic linguists. In conclusion, we will discuss why such a major debate took place precisely when it did and what the prospects of a planned, auxiliary language for global communication really were during the late 19th/early 20th centuries.

Federico Gobbo (University of Amsterdam):

*Why write in Esperanto? Motivations of original literature through the century*

The existence of literature, in the sense of belles lettres, in Esperanto may be puzzling at first glance; in particular, the choice of writing original literature in Esperanto in parallel or instead of writing in a national or minority language. This module is a walk through the motivations of major Esperanto classic writers, starting from the *Unua Libro* (1887) by L. L. Zamenhof himself, until *Sed nur fragmento* (1987) by Trevor Steele, in doing so covering the first century of Esperanto life. We will see how motivations change through the decades, according to the cultural background of the writer, and the position of Esperanto in it.

Dennis Keefe (Cullera, Spain)

*Learning and Teaching Foreign Languages to Adults with a Focus on Methods: Historical and Contemporary*

In this module you will get a good look at how languages have been taught and learned through the centuries. You will also understand how marketing misinforms language students, with exaggerated and false claims. In addition, you will learn how to use a wide variety of language teaching methods either to help you in your acquisition of a foreign language, or to help others speak and write more fluently. In other words, you will see the field of language pedagogy (young learners) and andragogy (adult learners) from the perspectives of both the learner and the teacher. The principles of language learning and teaching will also be applicable to the understanding and improvement of general communication skills in your native language.

Philippe Planchon (Université de Tours)

*Esperanto: language practices and innovations in the use of the linguistic code*

Between the appearance of Esperanto in 1887 and the current use of the language, there have been significant developments. This diachronic aspect is supported by an adaptation of the language to needs for expression, within a complex relationship to the norms of Esperanto and with the language background of the speakers. On the basis of attested data (written, oral, digital), we will look at what variations can be observed, and which language levels present such forms of innovation. We will consider phonological, morphological, lexical and grammatical levels, and we will also take into account the semantic, socio-cultural and enunciative parameters in order to understand the reasons for these phenomena.

Pascal Dubourg Glatigny (Centre Alexandre Koyré, CNRS, EHESS)

*The question of language in contemporary art: visualising Esperanto*

At the beginning of the 20th century, several artistic trends introduced the use of linguistic elements into the visual arts. These approaches often had a political perspective. In the 1960s, the popularisation of new linguistic theories reignited the debate. In this context the Japanese-American artist On Kawara developed his daily series using Esperanto, which he continued until his death in 2014. Although he remained isolated for a long time, from the beginning of the 21st century onwards, many artists in Europe, but also in South Africa and Japan, began to incorporate Esperanto into their interest for language. Since the ‘post-national’ project La Loko (2003-2007), which highlighted the misunderstood nature of the easiest language, examples have multiplied. Videos and installations emphasise the artificial and non-cultural nature of the language, including its code-like character, while others focus on the cultural practices of the movement, its literature and the transnational habits it has developed. Some use it as the language of storytelling, creating a form of unique intimacy. Many are interested in its universal character as a banner of linguistic diversity and a symbol of a shared universal.