



# Beyond Words: Women, Equality and the early Esperanto Community (1900-1920s) by Tamar Imerlishvili

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## Introduction

- **What is Esperanto?** - a constructed international auxiliary language, created in 1887, to help people easily communicate across borders.
- **What is the research about?** - women in the early 1900s - 1920s Esperanto community.  
The research questions: **Who were these women? Why did they choose Esperanto? What roles did they take? How did they contribute to the community?**
- **Why does this matter?** - studying these women shows that even in a male-dominated early 20th-century society, women found ways to take leadership and shape international projects. It also helps us understand how language movements can be shaped by diverse voices.



4th Esperanto World Congress, Dresden, 1908

## Methodology

**Sources:** Albums, personal correspondence, photos, yearbooks, society documents, journals, etc.

**Finding women:** Checking first names, titles, and gendered endings; verified online when possible.

**Noted information:** Name, profession, family background, years active, roles in Esperanto.

## Limitations

- **Mostly European/North American sources** - underrepresentation of other regions.
- **Potential unidentifiable women** - many may have been listed only by initials/no gendered markers.
- **Some reliance on secondary non-academic summaries** that may contain mistakes (e.g., Esperanto Wikipedia).

## Findings

- **Numbers & Ratio:** Relatively smaller proportion than men, but they may be undercounted due to inconsistent and missing records. Nonetheless, their contributions are instrumental in shaping the language and the community.
- **Professions:** Teachers, academics, translators, writers, students; some from influential families.
- **Esperanto roles:** Leadership positions, editors, organizers, translators, writers, actors, performers, speakers at congresses.
- **Geography:** Primarily Europe & North America, with some presence in Asia, Africa, and South America.
- **Family & background:** often educated, socially active, occasionally nobility.
- **Activities & contributions:** Teaching, translations, publications, cultural events, social reform.



10th British Esperanto Congress, Liverpool, 1919

## Discussion & Conclusion

Early women in Esperanto were trailblazers, linking language with social change, creating networks that spanned continents. Esperanto offered an unusually open, transnational, and egalitarian space, which women enriched through leadership, teaching, writing, and cultural organizing. In their hands, Esperanto went beyond words—it became a tool for inclusion, activism, and social progress.

Yet, their stories invite us to ask: what other contributions remain hidden? How did gender shape participation in this global movement? While much is known about prominent figures, many local initiatives and lesser-known voices remain unstudied. Future research could uncover these networks and the social impact they have achieved.



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