

## REVIEWS

Eugene A. Nida, *The Sociolinguistics of Interlingual Communication*, Éditions du Hazard, Collection Traductologie, Brussels 1996, 118 pp.

The book, pleasant to read for its content and lay-out, is an authorized synthesis of lectures delivered by Eugene A. Nida during his stay at the Institut Supérieur de Traducteurs et Interpretes de Bruxelles in 1994. The eight chapters of the book, though not extensive, provide a good survey of the author's opinions on language and translation, opinions based on many years of research into translation problems, especially those connected with translating the Bible.

1) In Chapter 1, *Linguistics and Sociolinguistics*, he shows that languages are not completely rule-governed: 'There are always fuzzy sets, overlapping analogies, constant change (...), and creative innovations, ..., which makes the task of translators a constant challenge and sometimes a real headache' (p. 27). Important features to be observed by the translator are different sociological dialects of speakers, different levels used for different occasions (ritual - formal - informal - casual - intimate) or cultural differences in languages (different degrees of politeness, different types of discourse). 'Sociolinguistics reveals the societal side of the language code' (p.32).

2) *The Codes and Roles of Verbal Communication*. The author describes paralinguistic codes (the quality of voice, loudness, intonation and speed of utterance, orthography, format) and extralinguistic codes (gestures, stance, distance, quality of paper, binding) and gives interesting examples of their effects. Among the sociological roles of language, the informative function is usually thought to be the most important role but in the author's view it doesn't represent more than 20 percent of all interlingual communication; the other roles are the following: imperative, performative, emotive (used by politicians), recreational (in Scrabble, crossword puzzles), aesthetic and interpersonal. The psychological roles of language (cognitive and expressive roles, naming, making comments and patterns) are equally, if not more, important.

3) *The Personal Use of Language*. Although highly personal, language is always learnt from others, essentially like any other culturally-transmitted skill. Two utterances of the same expressions may be different from the (phon)etic point of view, but are not distinctive from the (phon)emic point of view. What differs greatly in different individuals is their creativity. The author says (p. 51): 'True creativity has to take place in an individual's head. Unfortunately, some committees often rework a creative statement to the point where it ends up as the lowest common denominator of the members' thoughts.' Simultaneous interpreters are advised to 'grab the concepts and forget the words' (which is the quickest way of interpreting, due to the organization of the brain), but are to be regretted when they have to interpret for people in public life who speak without actually saying anything ('so they babble on and say nothing').

4) *Language in Society*. A number of U.S. citizens are multilingual, which partly explains why there are relatively few schools of translation and interpretation in the United States. Some speak-

ers shift from one language, dialect or level to another, often for prestige (this phenomenon is called diglossia). Eugen A. Nida criticizes certain professions for using unnecessarily elaborate terms, e.g. linguists for using 'passivization' and 'unaccusative'. (He suggests the use of 'passive formations' and 'cases other than the accusative' instead - but are not these substitutes too long?)

5) *The Language Contract*. People implicitly agree to use language in a recognized manner and to observe the following maxims of conversation: quantity, quality, relevance and clarity; two other maxims are very important, too: genuine modesty about one's ideas and not letting other people lose face. Intentional violations of these maxims are not rare. The author is very much against reading papers at committee meetings and conferences: spontaneous talking (and even prepared 'spontaneous' talking) has a much greater impact on the listeners. Speaking about language and gender, Eugene A. Nida says (p.74): 'Men tend to employ language to express dominance or one-upmanship, while women are usually much more concerned with language as a means of reassurance and solidarity.' Changes in language are inevitable and any attempts to depress them are largely a failure.

6) *The Meaning of Words and Idioms*. The author is rather critical of dictionaries: some definitions are too technical, others are redundant or not up-to-date. The last category is illustrated by the definition of *witch* as a woman with magical powers, while at present, as the author says, *witch* is used equally as a designation of men and women. I have found such 'old-fashioned' definitions in two British dictionaries (*Longman Modern English Dictionary*, 1976, and *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 1990), but on the other hand definitions covering also men as witches in two American dictionaries (*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1974, and *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, second edition, unabridged, 1993). The last mentioned dictionary gives, in Nida's view, too many meanings of some words, including the word *run*: he says that they are not distinct meanings, because significant differences reside primarily in the context and not in the word itself. Therefore he reduces the 146 meanings from *The Random House Dictionary* to 10 different kinds of context. We might object that though his classification is logical, it gives fewer examples than the dictionary, and that especially a foreign learner of the language might find a higher number of examples preferable. On the other hand, one cannot but agree with what Eugene A. Nida says about the importance of context (p. 87): 'Words have no meaning apart from some context, either the context of other words or of a particular setting.'

7) *The Meaning of Grammatical Constructions*. The author speaks about six semantic classes (entities, activities, states, processes, characteristics, links), which he regards as concepts much more important than traditional parts of speech (e.g. preposition, conjunction) or syntactic classes (e.g. subject, predicate). He is right in saying that 'possessive constructions' (e.g. *John's father*, *the criminal's punishment*) very often have nothing to do with possession, but less right in saying that grammars of English seldom indicate this fact: each of five grammars of English chosen at random by me mentions several meanings of the „'s genitive“ besides possession. To show differences between formal and semantic classes, Eugene A. Nida analyses noun-noun combinations (e.g. *astronomy satellite* [2 is the instrument for 1] versus *microscope observations* [1 is the instrument for doing 2]), adjective-noun combinations (e.g. *Liberian plantation* [1 is the place of 2] versus *human needs* [1 experiences 2] versus *volcanic activity* [1 does 2]), phrases with adverbs (e.g. *environmentally damaging waste* [3 does 2 to 1]) and phrases containing *of* (where he gives seventeen meanings, again illustrated by examples).

8) *Translator's View of Language*. Translators usually consider languages to be creative means of communication: although there are certain patterns for every type of discourse (e.g. essays, laws, lectures), people quite often change them to increase the impact of what they want to say. To translators, what is presented by languages also seems at least 50 percent redundant (speeches, sermons). Eugene A. Nida's advice that 'accordingly, translators need to know what in the source text needs to be left out in the process of translating' (p.110) appears rather dangerous to me: is the translator entitled to such manipulation of the source text without the author's explicit consent to such changes? This is not to speak against focussing on the roles of language rather than on the structures of language, recommended by Eugene A. Nida. He realistically speaks about the range

of equivalence in translation from a minimal to a maximal level and points out that (p.114) 'the term „equivalence“ can never be understood in its mathematical sense of complete identity. Translating can only reach a 'functional equivalence' or a 'practical communicative equivalence'.'

The whole book is written in a very lucid style and the accompanying examples are both witty and instructive, showing the author's wide-ranging linguistic knowledge and experience. There is no doubt that translators and linguists generally will find the book readable, interesting and useful.

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Daniel Jones, *English Pronouncing Dictionary*, 15th edition, eds. Peter Roach and James Hartman, Cambridge University Press 1997, 559 p.

Eighty years after the publication of the first edition of Daniel Jones' *English Pronouncing Dictionary* (first published by J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd. 1917), which has gained wide popularity together with a high reputation of the London School of Phonetics founded by Jones and his followers, the English-speaking public is enriched with a newly-revised, updated, extended and computer-based 15th edition of the highly appreciated indispensable work, having the models of current British English and American English pronunciations as its base. Over 80,000 entries (compared with over 59,000 words in the 14th edition) form the body of the dictionary. The 15th edition is a joint effort of Professor Peter Roach from the University of Reading and Professor James Hartman from the University of Kansas.

The original concept of Received Pronunciation, which has been widespread and indicative of social status rather than function, was considered to be 'imprecise' even by A.C. Gimson, editor of the extensively revised 14th edition (J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, London, Melbourne and Toronto 1977). Consequently, this controversial label has been completely abandoned in the present edition. 'The time has come to abandon the archaic name Received Pronunciation' (Introduction,v). Instead, the concept of BBC English drawing on the pronunciation of BBC newsreaders and announcers, whose pronunciation is based on a reasonable consensus and has no evident social class connotations, has been adopted as a 'more broadly-based and accessible model accent for British English' (Introduction,v).

The major and most striking innovation is the simultaneous presentation of the American English counterpart reflecting the type of pronunciation termed General American, which is neither markedly social nor regional in character. The two varieties of Present-Day English are thus treated as equal in importance within the English-speaking world.

Much desired recognition of the equal status of British and American English embodied in the 15th edition of Daniel Jones' *English Pronouncing Dictionary* has been previously done justice to by J.C. Wells' *Longman Pronouncing Dictionary* (first edition 1990), and much earlier by J.Windsor Lewis' *A Concise Pronouncing Dictionary of British and American English* (Oxford University Press 1972).

As stated in the Introduction, the choice of pronunciation, or pronunciation variant(s), has been determined by intuition and careful observation of English pronunciation, especially broadcast English. Thus the language of mass media of communication, namely the language of broadcasting, has been chosen as the representative of present-day pronunciation, bridging, by its true nature, the diversity of ways of pronunciation with regard to the social and regional spectrum. Another interesting feature is the implementation of the distinction between common and uncommon words; whereas the former category is generally connected with an informal style of speaking, the latter category of words is pronounced more carefully. The level of formality is a crucial indicator of means of language in use in general. Therefore this distinction at the level of the sound makes an important contribution to the degree of pragmatic awareness of the users of the dictionary.

Standard accents chosen for British and American English used by educated speakers of Eng-