

Idström, Anna & Sosa, Sachiko (eds.) (2009) *Kielissä kulttuurien ääni* [The voice of cultures is in the languages], Tietolipas 228. Helsinki: Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seura. Pp. 311.

Reviewed by Kalle Korhonen

Kielissä kulttuurien ääni is a popularizing collection of articles intended for a broader readership, not just linguists, competent in Finnish. Its purpose is to offer up-to-date information of the relationship between *kieli* and *kulttuuri*, which translate in this case as “language” and “culture” in English. In their introduction (“Johdanto”, pp. 7–12) the editors define the difficult concept of “culture” broadly as “the acquired and not inherited characteristics of humans ... [culture] is something that belongs to the members of a group and is not the personal feature of an individual” (p. 7). The introduction also contains short resumés of the articles in Finnish.

Urho Määttä’s answer to the question “Why does the grammarian forget the culture?” (pp. 17–34) is based on the author’s conception of the essence of human language. In an intelligent discussion, Määttä emphasizes the emergent nature of linguistic or grammatical description. Linguistic description is, according to the author, a language game that emerges in order to make the rules of language more explicit. Like a writing system, linguistic description then starts to have an influence on the language itself. Linguistics is a part of the culture of language, but the norm-constructing nature of social institutions has created the idea that language is separate from the rest of human culture. Furthermore, Määttä explains why Noam Chomsky’s approach to language is so popular, but also controversial, by comparing it to a monetary system: a “Chomskyan” description of the monetary system would be limited to the arithmetic relations between the monetary units.

Ulla Vanhatalo discusses (pp. 35–47) Anna Wierzbicka’s semantics and her ‘natural semantic metalanguage’ (NSM). NSM is based on the idea of a small core of basic and universal meanings that are common to all human languages, and that are used to analyze all the other meanings. Vanhatalo stresses the significance of Wierzbicka’s personal experiences first in the different academic cultures in Europe and in the US, and then as an immigrant in Australia. According to Vanhatalo, Wierzbicka has meant the NSM to be usable across the lexicon, although it is not very evident

how this could be done. The metalanguage seems especially well suited to the analysis of, say, emotional terminology and norms.

One could say that three contributions, those by Anna Idström (pp. 51–69), Zsuzsánna Bodó (pp. 70–83) and Maria Kela (pp. 84–98), all approach translation, but from different angles. Idström focuses in an illuminating way on metaphors and their life cycle and shows why, for a speaker of Inari Sami, hunger is in the buttocks. Bodó discusses the factors that make translating possible and claims that cultural differences test the competence of the translator. Especially interesting is the short discussion on how target groups have recently been taken into account in the translation of dialects. E.g., when Kalle Päätalo's popular Finnish novels were translated into English, the original code switching between dialect and standard was not maintained, because the translations were addressed to Finnish immigrants in America who had switched language. In this case, even the use of standard English gave the audience the possibility to experience its own past at an emotional level.

The Bible is one of the most widely translated works in the world, and Maria Kela's article discusses how biblical metaphors that originated in Hebrew have been translated into different languages. Bible translations have in the course of time created several strange expressions or misunderstandings (e.g., the "horns of Moses"). Kela focuses on the metaphors "God's son", "Son of Man" and "the right hand" and explains in a lucid manner why the phrase *Ihmisen Poika* ("the son of a human being", Finnish for "Son of Man") has disappeared from the most recent Finnish Bible translation. The element "son" was in the original Hebrew undergoing grammaticalization and the phrase was a dead metaphor with the meaning "a human being".

The contributions of Ekaterina Gruzdeva (pp. 101–122) and Lotta Aunio (pp. 123–136) look at how humans use language to create order in the world. Gruzdeva's theme is the numeral classifiers in Nivkh, a Palaeosiberian language spoken in Outer Manchuria and in Sakhalin and rapidly becoming extinct. The classifiers can be divided into three groups, of which the special classifiers illustrate the cultural context of Nivkh as it was until a century ago. Transport vehicles, fishing equipment, long wooden objects, kinship terminology and time and space all have numerous special classifiers. Due to language attrition, the classifier system is now rapidly declining. Aunio focuses on the expressions of time in Bantu languages, particularly in Ha, Ikoma and Swahili. She starts with John S. Mbiti's influential and much-abused idea of "the African

conception of time”, in which the future is allegedly not included. In practice, this is not the case in the languages discussed by Aunio: there are tenses that refer to the future. Like in many other languages, some tenses do not only refer to time but can also be used to express the *Aktionsart*. Especially interesting is the author’s account of how locative noun classes can be used to express temporal relations.

Two Uralic (Finno-Ugrian) languages on the brink of extinction, Hanti and Mansi, receive attention in Sachiko Sosa’s (pp. 137–155) and Ulla-Maija Kulonen’s (pp. 156–183) articles. Sosa discusses the prerequisites for understanding Hanti narratives. Hanti is a Uralic language spoken in Western Siberia. Sosa offers comments on some passages in Hanti narrative. Among the rich material, what is interesting in particular is how the taboo word “bear” can be avoided even in everyday discourse, or how it used to be avoided before language attrition began. The bear, a “totem animal” for the speakers of many Uralic languages, briefly returns to the scene in Ulla-Maija Kulonen’s contribution. Her focus is on the lexicon relating to love and sex in the Eastern Mansi dialect, an extinct variant of Mansi spoken until the 20th century in Western Siberia. In a brilliant discussion, Kulonen looks at heroic legends in particular. The discussion has interesting implications for the research on sexuality: the Mansi heroic legends do not consider same-sex relationships as a threat to the society, but have a more open approach. Both sexes are listed as possible partners for relationships, and a successful person is competent in both men’s and women’s tasks. Even the sexual identity of the bear is ambiguous. As regards the Uralic languages, the volume also contains Merja Salo’s useful overview (pp. 225–245) of how the lexicon of this language group reflects different cultural contexts and contacts.

The common theme in the fascinating contributions of Riikka Länsisalmi (pp. 184–205) and Kimmo Granqvist (pp. 206–222) is politeness. Länsisalmi discusses the polite registers in Japanese (*keigo*). The elaborate language of politeness used to indicate the strict hierarchy of the society, but nowadays the speakers of Japanese use them to assess and indicate the limits of their own in-groups (*uchi*) and the formality of the situation. A related issue is the controversial position of personal pronouns in Japanese. There are words that can be defined as personal pronouns, but the pragmatic rules of the language do not allow references made with a 2nd or 3rd person pronoun to a person who is higher in the social hierarchy than the speaker. Granqvist analyzes how social structures are reflected in Finnish Romani inter-generational and inter-gender discourse. Like the

other Romani variants, the Finnish Romani shows strong influence of the languages with which the Roma community has been in contact: the Germanic languages and Finnish. The politeness system is asymmetric: the older members of the community rank higher than the young. The pragmatics of politeness in Finnish Romani includes a highly evolved system of how to communicate taboo expressions and words between persons whose social position is different.

The common theme in Eeva Sippola's (pp. 246–264) and Riho Grünthal's (pp. 265–289) articles is language attrition. Sippola focuses on Chabacano – cover term for the varieties of Philippine Creole Spanish – and looks at several different phenomena of contact. The author sees the future of the language in a positive light. Two Uralic languages are mentioned in the title of Grünthal's article, Mordvin and Veps, but the scope is wider. The author provides interesting information about the position of Uralic minority languages in contemporary Russia in general. Although the speaker community of Erzya Mordvin seems large at first sight (hundreds of thousands), similar attrition phenomena are attested in it as in Veps, which only has some thousands of speakers and is rapidly declining.

Grünthal's article contains a most useful introduction for the lay reader to the central concepts of linguistic identity, ethnicity and nationality. Important points on these matters are also made in the final chapter, by Anna Mauranen (pp. 290–305). This contribution seeks to establish if English, as a global *lingua franca* (ELF), has a cultural context at all. The diffusion of English has stirred emotions in recent decades because, on the one hand, there is concern for global Anglo-Americanization and, on the other, English speakers may feel that they are being deprived of their heritage. It is quite obvious that as a *lingua franca* English has no single cultural context, but Mauranen emphasizes the multiplicity of the contexts involved. The author also claims that the use of English as a *lingua franca* in global communication can make more room for local multilingualism than the use of several international languages. This seemingly paradoxical idea is intelligent and plausible. Of course it remains to be seen how many global *lingua francas* there will be in the future; it is not impossible that they will be more than one.

In all, some chapters seem at first rather specific for a popularizing publication, but all of them reach a sufficient level of generality. Most are based on original research by the authors themselves. Although the primary viewpoint is in most cases language, the cultural context remains always in

sight. The chapters are concise, sometimes even too short, given that many authors of necessity begin with an introduction of a general kind. The lack of a subject index is a disappointment, and it might have been a good idea to include the summaries in another language than Finnish. On the contents side, there is some room for criticism: given that language attrition and extinction are themes in several chapters, the authors might have elaborated on how to act against them. However, in its genre, the volume is of the highest quality and makes a most inspiring read.

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