any text without first considering the various factors of communication which entered into the original discourse. The translator's task is so much more than finding matching words. He must select and arrange the lexical and grammatical features of the receptor language in such a way as to reproduce in so far as possible not only the content of the original communication event but also an equivalent of its form. If this is not done, the translation will certainly fail to be in any sense a dynamic equivalent.

EUGENE A. NIDA

VARIETIES OF LANGUAGE[1]

Most people know that there are a great many different languages in the world, but no one knows exactly how many. Various estimates have been made, but figures based on exact data are simply not available. To some extent, this uncertainty is due to the fact that in some parts of the world no detailed linguistic surveys have been carried out. New Guinea, for example, is reputed to have more than 700 different languages, but there are some sizeable areas of this large island where no linguistic surveys have as yet been made. Moreover, determining whether two different forms of speech should be regarded as related dialects or as separate languages depends largely upon the criteria of mutual intelligibility. In some classifications of languages, for example, all the so-called dialects of Chinese are lumped together as being one language, when in reality several of them (for example, Amoyese, Hakka, and Cantonese) are mutually unintelligible. On the other hand, Spanish and Portuguese, although to a large extent mutually intelligible, are normally regarded as two distinct languages because they have two distinct national "standards". If we speak of mutually unintelligible forms of speech, we can probably arrive at a figure of approximately 2,500 languages in the world. Yet if we were to add up the total number of speakers of only the first hundred of these languages (those with the largest numbers of speakers), we would have a figure exceeding the total population of the earth. The reason for this is that so many people speak two or more of these major languages.

At the end of 1971, at least some portion of the Holy Scriptures had been produced in 1,457 languages, with 253 languages having the entire Bible and 330 more having the New Testament. These languages represent the mother tongues of fully 98 per cent of the world's population. This means, however, that there are approximately 1,000 additional languages (whose speakers comprise less than 2 per cent of the world's population) which do not have any part of the Bible. Certainly, even these languages should have at least some part of God's word, and at present there are Bible translators who are working in fully half of them.

In addition to the multiplicity of languages, there is also the existence of

[1] This article is based on a lecture given at a Translators' Seminar in Halle, DDR, 1971.

many different dialects within languages. In Norway there are two competing literary dialects, one on a more traditional literary level, the other a more colloquial form of speech. English speakers are increasingly aware of some of the differences between British and American usage. For example, there is the *hood* versus the *bonnet* and the *trunk* versus the *boot* (parts of a car) and the *drug store* versus the *chemist's shop*. In Spanish there is the frequently mentioned distinction between the dialects which pronounce the letter *z* the same as *s* and those which give it a *th*-like (*theta*) sound. In Arabic there is the age-old conflict between the classical form of the language, as standardized by the Koran and followed in literary productions to the present time, and the distinctive colloquial forms which are almost universally employed by speakers of Arabic. In fact, in almost all languages speakers are aware of certain differences, some of which carry very important information about the status of the speakers and the relevance of the information involved. These are the subtle varieties of language of which the translator must be constantly aware if he is to do justice to the text which he must reproduce.

Levels of Language

Any language spoken by a large structured society—this applies to all national and world languages—has several distinct levels of usage. In general, it is probably best to think in terms of five distinguishable levels or styles: formal, consultative, casual, intimate, and frozen.[2]

The *consultative* level of language usage occurs between people who do not know each other and who are talking about something which is neutral in emotive value. This style is the most neutral of all the levels, and in fact it is most easily defined by the absence of features which are typical of the other levels. When people are using this level of language, the focus is normally on the message, and hence there is no need for rhetorical elaboration. There are, however, frequent occurrences of so-called "contact language" in which the respondent employs such expressions as *yes*, *I know*, *well*, and *that's interesting*, as a means of showing that he is participating in the conversation. The setting for this type of language is not formal, and therefore the source is not expected to employ formal language. What is distinctive about the consultative style, in contrast with formal style, is that some measure of feedback is expected.

The *formal* level of language is likewise used between persons who are unknown to each other, but in this case the setting is formal—for example, a university lecture hall, parliamentary chambers, or a public auditorium. One person does the speaking, and there is little or no feedback from the audience. Accordingly, an English speaker is likely to employ *may* rather than *might* or *can*; to use a clause such as *for whom did you get it?* rather than *who did you get it for?*; and an adverb outside rather than inside of the infinitive phrase—for example, *purposely to show* rather than *to purposely show*. There is also a tendency to use phrasal prepositions—for example, *on behalf of* in place of

[2] See Martin Joos. 1959. The isolation of styles. Monograph Series on Language and Linguistics (Georgetown University) 12.107-113; and 1960. The Five Clocks. International Journal of American Linguistics 28, No. 2, Part V. Note also the contribution of Szabó Zoltán. 1970. The types of stylistic studies and the characterization of individual style: an outline of problems. Linguistics 62.96-104.

for, and *with reference to* in place of *about*. Many speakers using a formal level of language avoid the contractions of ordinary spoken English; they say *cannot* rather than *can't*, *will not* rather than *won't*, and *I shall see* rather than *I'll see*. Not all languages, of course, have the same types of differences between consultative and formal styles, but there are certain contrasts which are similar. The formal style employs (1) fuller and more precise forms, (2) closer conformity to written style, (3) avoidance of clipped phrases, and (4) reduction of colloquial expressions (or apologies for using such expressions).

The *casual* level of language normally occurs between people who know each other and in settings where the participants are relaxed. Furthermore, the topic of the communication is normally not too urgent, and therefore one can employ a degree of verbal play. The two principal characteristics of this level are ellipsis and slang, often including some taboo terminology. This casual level of language may also occur between persons who do not know each other, but who are operating in a very familiar setting—bargaining in a market or store, in which case the conversation may include such clipped expressions as *How much? One dollar each. Too much! How about these? Only two bits each. Okay, gimme four.*

The *intimate* level of language occurs only between people who are well acquainted and who have shared many linguistic and nonlinguistic experiences. As a result they may employ extreme ellipses which would not be intelligible to outsiders. Persons employing intimate level of language often use highly specialized names, not only for one another but also for common objects, especially body parts. In intimate language much is communicated by supplementary codes of proximity (such as facial gestures, smell, and touch), so that language becomes quite secondary for conveying messages.

The fifth level of language style is aptly called *frozen* because its form and content are largely predictable. Eulogies are one of the most typical forms of frozen style, and in some churches sermons are also largely frozen. Since the content of sermons is largely predictable, there is a tendency for elaborate rhetorical devices, somewhat artificial pronunciation (to fit the ritual mood), and a fixed intonation (often a compromise between formal style and a chant form). A fixed liturgy is the most extreme example of the frozen style.

Though everyone will admit that these five levels or styles (with certain minor subdivisions and modifications) are typical of all large languages spoken by an urbanized society in which there are several definable socio-economic classes, some people would hesitate to think that some so-called primitive languages also have such levels of style, but this is almost always the case. For example, in a number of languages of Africa there is a very distinct form of language used by a chief when he is making a formal proclamation. In fact, his statement may be in such a "high" form that it must be explained to the people by an official spokesman. In some tribes there is an official "praiser" of the chief who must employ a frozen form of language in talking to and about the chief. In such societies the level of language used by the elders when they are discussing some important event or issue often takes on the characteristics of formal style.

The various levels of language often remain unnoticed until one fails to employ the appropriate forms. For example, we quickly react to the person

who attempts to be "too friendly" by employing casual or even intimate language before an appropriate period of acquaintance. Spanish speakers are especially sensitive to those who want to employ too soon the familiar second person pronoun *tu* and the corresponding verbal endings. The use of slang in the wrong setting is especially annoying and may even be shocking. The inclusion of witticisms in a sermon may likewise have quite different effects in different settings. In America, jokes from the pulpit are usually acceptable—in fact, some of the best preachers regularly elicit laughs from their congregations—but in Europe similar language in the pulpit would generally be regarded as at least inappropriate, if not decidedly uncouth.

Socioeconomic Dialects

In a number of societies different socioeconomic dialects play a much larger role than most people suspect. Traditionally, British people have placed great emphasis upon the linguistic acceptability of certain dialects such as "public school English" and "the speech of Oxford and Cambridge". With the current social revolution in England, much of this dialectal snobbery is disappearing. Even the BBC is admitting to the air some persons whose pronunciation would have been considered quite unacceptable for its programs not long ago.

In the United States there has been a tendency to deny the importance of dialectal differences, though some prejudice has long existed against certain forms of language. For example, the pronunciation of *bird* to rhyme with *toyed* (as in *he toyed with the idea*) has been frowned on. Recently William Labov made a detailed analysis of certain features of the dialects of New York and found some rather amazing situations.[3] He studied the occurrence of the *r* sound (or the lack of it) in such words as *bared*, *guard*, *dark*, *car*, *beer*, *beard*, and *board*, and found that some speakers pronounce *bared* like *bad*, *guard* like *God*, etc. When he compared the *r* and *r*-less pronunciation of such words with the socioeconomic class and age of the speakers and the contexts in which the words were uttered, he discovered that the occurrence or non-occurrence of *r* was not simply a matter of free variation but that it correlated very well with class membership and context of use. In casual speech, the upper-class speakers were found to use *r* forms only 18 per cent of the time, but in reading paired words they used the *r* forms 60 per cent of the time. Among the lowest socioeconomic class, the *r* forms did not occur at all in casual speech; but in reading paired words, speakers from this class employed the *r* pronunciation 38 per cent of the time. Middle-class speakers shifted from 5 per cent used in casual speech to 78 per cent in reading paired words—considerably higher than even the upper class. The middle-class speakers were obviously more linguistically insecure and hence tended to overdo the correction, so as to imitate what they regarded as the proper forms of language.

Many people judge the value of dialects merely in terms of their correlation with socioeconomic classes. They conclude that the speech of the upper class

[3] William Labov. 1970. The reflection of social processes in linguistic structures, in Joshua A. Fishman, ed., Readings in the Sociology of Language (The Hague: Mouton), pp. 240-275.

is intrinsically superior, since it carries greater prestige and rewards its speakers with greater material benefits. Generally upper-class persons conclude that the failure of lower-class persons to use the "proper form" of language is due either to laziness or to linguistic incompetence. Such judgments, however, are entirely superficial. Any form of language which is maintained in a society must have certain positive values or it soon disappears. In New York City, for example, the use of upper-class forms does improve one's chances of getting a better-paying job, but at the same time the lower-class usage is a much better indicator that the speaker of such a dialect will come out on top in a local fight. Though lower-class speakers may admit the prestige value of upper-class usage, they often adhere to their own language forms with surprising tenacity. This is not primarily because it is too hard to learn the upper-class usage, but rather because they find their own form of language an important mark of social identification, a symbol of the constituency with which they feel at home. Furthermore, there is a marked tendency for lower-class persons to feel that though the upper classes may have certain economic advantages, the people of these classes are less trustworthy, more inclined to exploit others, and less valuable to cultivate as friends.

Attitudes of Speakers Toward Other Dialects

The attitude of many people toward a dialect which is not their own is largely conditioned by their evaluation of the speakers of that dialect. They may regard them as being "lazy", "snobbish", "uncouth", "high hat", "low down", "country bumpkins", or "city folks", and their attitude toward the speakers will be projected to the dialect which they speak. In general, however, judgments are often projected onto the various forms of language so that dialects themselves are frequently characterized as being "soft", "musical", "gutteral", "harsh", "sweet", "barbarous", "refined", etc. In most instances, people have positive evaluations of their own dialect and negative evaluations of the dialects of others, but that is not always the case. New Yorkers, for example, tend to depreciate their own forms of language, while Bostonians and Philadelphians tend to regard their forms of language as being superior. There is a tendency for the speakers of Arabic each to regard his own national dialect (whether of Beirut, of Damascus, of Amman, or of Bagdad) as superior to other national forms of the language, but the Bedouin dialects are almost universally thought to be superior to any metropolitan forms, since the relatively conservative Bedouin dialects retain so many features of Koranic usage.

Alternative Use of Dialects

Many persons imagine that most speakers use only one form of speech, namely, their own "mother dialect", but this is far from being the case. Just as there are bilingual or multilingual persons, there are also bidialectal or multidialectal persons. In the Philippines many children switch easily back and forth between Philippine English (often called "bamboo English") and standard American English—but one must be very certain of the setting in which such shifts can take place. A wrong choice can be very offensive.

American children growing up in England often employ two quite different forms of English. One teenage girl made it a practice to use American English in speaking to her boy friends, but British English in speaking with her girl friends. American English had a prestige value (even something of the exotic!) with the boy friends, but for identificational purposes British English was much more acceptable to the girl friends.

Language switching is especially conspicuous in Haiti where practically everyone speaks Haitian Creole (a creolized form of French) and some 15 per cent of the population speaks normal French. All formal schooling is, of course, in French. When boys and girls are in school together they usually speak Haitian Creole, at least outside the classroom, but the moment courtship begins they use French exclusively and this continues right through the marriage ceremony. But as the couple leave the church, Haitian Creole begins again!

The question is often asked as to why alternative forms of language are preserved. Would not the principle of economy of effort soon eliminate one form of language in favor of another? The fact is that human behavior does not respond directly to the degree of energy expenditure. Tradition (itself a form of inertia) has a good deal of influence, but quite apart from tradition there are a number of values which keep alternative usages alive. The more specific of these are group identification, secret communication (ability to communicate without everyone else knowing what is being said), pleasure in variety, the association of language with particular topics and contexts (e.g. Latin for the Roman Catholic mass), and sense of increased verbal competence in being able to manipulate more than one linguistic code.

Attitudes toward Speakers of Other Dialects

When there are alternative forms of speech within a single society, certain attitudes toward the speakers of other dialects or languages almost inevitably develop. In Latin America Spanish speakers usually have a very superior attitude toward the speakers of Indian languages and regard the Spanish language as being inherently and innately superior to any of the Indian tongues. Almost the same kind of attitude exists in Tanzania by speakers of Swahili toward those whose mother tongue is one of the minor languages of the hinterland. What is interesting about such situations is that the persons who belong to a lower socioeconomic class often share these disparaging views concerning their own languages or dialects. Many Indians in Spanish-speaking America, for example, will agree, at least overtly, with the judgment that their language is somehow inferior. Covertly, of course, many Indians hold a number of adverse judgments against the Spanish-speaking constituency and their use of language.

Some very interesting research was carried out by Professor W. E. Lambert and others in French-speaking Canada to determine what attitudes were held by the people toward English-speaking and French-speaking persons.[4] For this experiment they recorded the speech of persons who were equally fluent

[4] W. E. Lambert, R. C. Gardner, R. Olton, and K. Tunstall, 1970. A study of the roles of attitudes and motivation in second-language learning, in Joshua A. Fishman, ed., Readings in the Sociology of Language (The Hague: Mouton), pp. 473-491.

in both French and English. Persons who knew both French and English were then asked to characterize the personalities of the speakers on the basis of their speech, without, of course, being told that the same persons had recorded both an English and a French portion of the test. Quite to the astonishment of most persons, not only did the English persons who spoke English as a mother tongue rate the speakers of the French passages as being smaller, darker, less honest, and more deceptive, but even those who spoke French as a mother tongue had relatively similar judgments of the speakers of the French passages. No doubt French speakers have certain compensating positive values associated with their own language, but it is important to recognize that a set of cultural values held by a dominant section of society can be shared by those in a less favorable socioeconomic class.

Varieties of Language and the Translator

One of the most complete and subtle problems which faces a translator is the proper matching of stylistic levels of language. The Bible translator cannot afford to select a level of language which is so high as to make the message inaccessible to the people to whom it is directed. At the same time the language of Scripture cannot be such as to debase the contents. For example, in some parts of the Arabic-speaking world completely colloquial forms of language are employed only for comic strips and pornographic literature. A strictly colloquial form of language is therefore quite unacceptable for the New Testament, despite the fact that it would no doubt be more widely understood.

But even after one has chosen a level of language which is presumably adequate for the Bible, one must still make a number of further choices, since the Scriptures reflect more than one type of style. What may be appropriate for the Epistle to the Hebrews is certainly much too elegant for the simple, straightforward style of the Gospel of Mark. Likewise, the language of the Psalms should be quite different from the narratives of Joshua and Judges.

In some languages the levels or styles which must be used between exposition and reported conversation differ appreciably. That means that when conversations are quoted (for example, the conversation between Jesus and the woman of Samaria), one must use quite a different form of language from what is employed when a discourse is reported (for example, the upper room discourse of John 14-16).

Translating involves much more than finding corresponding words between two languages. In fact, the words are only minor elements in the total discourse. In many respects the tone of a passage (that is, the style of the language) carries far more impact, and often even much more meaning, than the words themselves.