

## Book reviews

Joel C. Kuipers: *Language, Identity, and Marginality in Indonesia: The Changing Nature of Ritual Speech on the Island of Sumba*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. xviii & 183 pp. US\$59.95 hardback; US\$35.00 paper.

Twenty years after he started fieldwork on the eastern Indonesian island of Sumba and eight years after his first monograph on Weyewa ritual speech (Kuipers 1990) Joel Kuipers presents in this book a detailed examination of the substantial changes that have been affecting this ritual speech. He minutely analyzes the history of the shift in meaning and use of Weyewa ritual speech as a “process of transformation and marginalization” both “in its ethnographic and linguistic context” (p. xi). Kuipers argues that “languages differentiate, change, grow, decline, and expand not because of ‘natural’ life cycles but because of the way that linguistic ideologies, held by interested actors and speakers and those who hold power over them, mediate between features of linguistic structure and socioeconomic relations” (p. 149). Together with prestige registers and respect languages, ritual languages especially transport and mirror these ideologies “since they are the focus of some of the most strongly held beliefs about what language is FOR, why it exists, how it should be used, and how it should change or be preserved” (p. 149). With this approach Kuipers emphasizes the role of linguistic ideologies for the study of language shift and language change in progress. The book addresses not only (anthropological) linguists and (linguistic) anthropologists: Kuipers is also “aware that this book will be read by the descendants of some of the people described,” and he hopes that “they will find much they can recognize, and much to admire in what was arguably one of the most vibrant and integral traditions of parallelistic speech anywhere in the world” (p. xiii).

After the table of contents, a list of plates, figures, and tables, a short preface, the acknowledgements, and a few notes on orthography, the

book starts with an introductory chapter (pp. 1–21). Like so many other fieldworkers returning to their field site after a longer break, Kuipers also noticed during his 1994 visit to the Weyewa dramatic changes with respect to the language and the culture of the ethnic groups he had been researching so far. One of his old consultants, an important political leader and a renowned expert in ritual speech, had converted to Christianity. This conversion also affected his speech. Like many other Sumbanese, this former expert in ritual speech use hardly produced any traditional ritual, angry, and authoritative speech for political and religious purposes any more — the traditional ritual register was superseded by the national language, the Bahasa Indonesia. Instead of the old, poetic, and rather complex forms of ritual speech that consisted of about 3,500 traditional couplets that were combined and linked together in situational-appropriate ways, Kuipers observed the emerging of new forms of ritual speaking — namely laments, applause, prestige naming, and contest songs. The anthropologist attempts to understand the new features of ritual speaking as a “historical and ideological shift that [he calls] ‘marginalization,’ in which highly valued verbal resources are reinterpreted ... from center to margin” (p. 4). He shows that after the Dutch invasion, Sumbanese languages and language varieties were reevaluated and that their status was now determined in relation to other languages spoken on Sumba island. Kuipers describes how Weyewa ritual speech became gradually marginalized soon after the Dutch invasion: ritual speech was understood now as simply a part of everyday Weyewa language — which itself was characterized as only one of many other languages spoken within the territory of the Dutch East Indies.

Chapter 2 (pp. 22–41) is titled “Place, identity, and the shifting forms of cultivated speech: a geography of marginality.” Kuipers shows that at the beginning of the twentieth century, changes in village size and in population growth, as well as the dispersal of the Weyewa population from large (and secure) villages to smaller hamlets at the gardens in the mountains, resulted in a growing marginality of ritual speech. People moved away from their former ceremonial centers, with the consequence that ritual speech was less frequently performed (ten lines of ritual couplet speech are presented on p. 27 in this chapter, together with English glosses). And if ritual speech was performed, it lost its former genealogical depth of narration and its general overall complexity: ritual speech became colloquial, it changed into “garden talk” (p. 37). At the same time, the new Dutch hierarchy made it impossible for ritual performers to enact “the history of their domain as the center of the world” — instead “they now needed to see their discourses as a sub-species of a larger more authoritative discourse that issued from a colonial

metropolis” (p. 38). Given the fact that the Dutch used the Malay language for education, government, and mission activities, the Sumbanese were gradually forced to deal with this national language — and it became evident that the relation between Sumbanese local language and the Malay-Indonesian national language was one of hierarchic inclusion: everything that could be said in Sumbanese could also be said in, and translated into, Malay — but not vice versa.

Angry ritual speech was marginalized and denounced as “traditional.” The Dutch administration allowed the former leaders — the “angry men” — to perform their ritual speech as an anachronistic sign of their former power, but these former leaders could no longer “display their potency through violence: that was the role of the Dutch army and police” (p. 66). To cope with this changing social reality, new forms of emotional expressions had to be developed. “Anger” — this high-status emotion so closely associated with ritual speech — lost its rank and was superseded by the Christian concept of “humility” — an “emotional posture of subordination and marginality,” which — nevertheless — “permitted a kind of clever, cunning autonomy outside the watchful eye of authority” (p. 43). Chapter three, titled “Towering in rage and cowering in fear: emotion, self, and verbal expression in Sumba” (pp. 42–66), describes the role and the “importance of emotion as a cultural factor in linguistic and social change” (p. 20). Kuipers minutely describes the metamorphosis of “anger” as the traditional emotional model of self-expression of the “original world” into “humility” and “cunning” as the models for Weyewa forms of self-expression in the “modern world” (p. 65). This chapter presents 56 lines of speech data on Weyewa laments. Kuipers emphasizes that anger has been marginalized and stigmatized in the developing Indonesian society; however, he also points out that anger in Weyewa life is still there, but now it is “supposed to be linked to a narrower range of contexts” (p. 64).

The next chapter deals with these “Changing forms of political expressions,” particularly with “the role of ideologies of audience completeness” (pp. 67–94). The concepts of “audience completeness” and “totality” were (and are?) crucial for Weyewa ritual speech: the political center of a village, “a charismatic ruler... who [embodies] and [protects] the security of the entire village” (p. 69) was perceived as being “not complete unless the full audience was there to witness and admire [the performer’s] theatrical display” (p. 70). The ritual couplet that expresses this idea is quoted (for the third time) on page 70 (see also pp. 6 and 12). Kuipers illustrates how a Weyewa leader manages to convene an audience and how he commands the spiritual audience (here we get another 37 lines of original speech data, together with its free English glosses). The author

then discusses the Weyewa ideology of “audience completeness” and describes “how spectatorship emerged as [sic] not only as a status but as a process in which the pragmatic opposition between performer and audience is projected into a more generalized relation between the authoritative discourse of the state and the citizens of the state” (p. 20) — a state that was first governed by the Dutch, then occupied by the Japanese, finally achieved independence — and then saw Sukarno’s rise and his brutal suppression of the communist party of Indonesia. Kuipers provides the reader with another 55 lines of ritual laments and songs performed during the Japanese occupation, 18 lines of a song sung during the 1955 elections, 15 lines of English glosses of a song sung during the 1966 “communist” coup, and an Indonesian speech presented during a party campaign rally in 1982 (which consists of 99 lines). He shows how the Weyewa beliefs about the importance of “audience completeness ... have been projected from the domain of agricultural and religious ritual on to the realm of national politics in ways that reveal and create new sentiments and structures of marginality” (p. 94). In this developing world of modern politics the Sumbanese had to accept their communicative role of response and ratification:

Skills in convening an audience and then using ritual speech to enact one’s central status for the assembled through ... gradually come to be relegated to an increasingly narrowed ritual domain. Political activity was becoming a matter of simply RESPONDING to ritually appropriate ways ... the ritual cheer *yawao* has become an example of the limits of ordinary Weyewa participation in national politics (p. 151).

Moreover, the political, socioeconomic, and religious changes also affected the “Ideologies of personal naming” and thus caused additional “Language shift.” These processes are examined in chapter five (pp. 95–124). After the Second World War most Sumbanese converted to Christianity. This implied that their original Weyewa names, which traditionally “served to classify people in terms of address and reference ... and as high status,” were superseded by Christian names that now only serve one function: to “indicate one’s religion and gender” (p. 21). Kuipers first describes the traditional Weyewa name practices (illustrating their cultural importance with 18 lines of traditional eulogies), then reports on recent patterns of naming, and finally shows that Weyewa traditional prestige naming — formerly closely associated with spectacular feasts where individuals acquired such names — survives in the naming of racehorses, businesses, and *bemos* (small pickup trucks used all over Indonesia for public transport).

Chapter 6 — “From miracles to classrooms: changing forms of erasure in the learning of ritual speech” (pp. 125–148) — deals with the “changing forms of erasure employed in the teaching and learning of ritual speech” (p. 125). In this chapter Kuipers examines “how changing learning practices affected ritual speech.” He describes “how in teaching and learning ritual speech, the process whereby novices make mistakes and are sociolinguistically supported by their elders is systematically denied any communicative or interactional reality” (p. 21). The Weyewa diversity of speech varieties has been selectively ignored — or “erased” — in colonial and postcolonial times and a new ideology of what ritual speech ideally is has been established. This ideal of ritual speech has shifted “from ‘angry’ to ‘humble,’ from exemplary to marginal, from sacred to secular” (p. 125). These days Indonesian schools on Sumba only teach Weyewa “laments” — and therefore “laments are coming to stand for ritual speaking as a whole” (p. 21).

The final chapter, the “Conclusions” (pp. 149–155), summarizes the arguments put forward in the preceding chapters. Here the author finally manages to secure the coherence of his arguments, putting together all the various aspects of Weyewa language and culture change discussed. He concludes that an important result of his research is his finding “that linguistic marginality can be explained with reference to linguistic ideologies” that operate according to “at least five semiotic processes” (p. 152). These processes are

*Essentialization*, whereby a linguistic feature that *indexed* a social group or category comes to be seen as *essentially* or *naturally* linked to it. ... *Spectatorship* ... a process in which the relation between performer and audience has come to be projected on to other communicative relations in society, such as that between state and citizen. ... *Erasure* ... the process in which ideology, in simplifying the field of linguistic practices, renders some persons or activities or sociolinguistic phenomena invisible. ... *Hierarchic inclusion* ... the transformation of ideas about speech in which a language, or language variety, once seen as complete and integral by virtue of its relation to a locale becomes to be viewed as included in a larger grouping. ... [and] *Indexicalization* ... a changing attitude toward language in which the function of a sign once viewed as semantic ... comes to be viewed primarily as ostensive and pragmatic” (p. 152f.).

Kuipers rightly claims that his findings have implications for studies of linguistic shift and sociocultural marginality. “Linguistic ideology” has to be regarded as a key concept for such studies. Its important impact can probably best be illustrated by researching highly valued language varieties like ritual speech. Moreover, cultural models like models of subjectivity and selfhood as well as ideologies of place have to be

integrated in such studies. Thus, this monograph ends with a strong plea for anthropological linguistic research on aspects of the language, the identity, and the marginality of small local speech communities (like the Weyewa) that are endangered and that have to find, define, or redefine their “place” within a big, strongly dominating and “cannibalizing” language of the wider world (like the Bahasa Indonesia, the Indonesian national language). Kuipers’s proposals for how to save the complex forms of Weyewa ritual speech on the last page of this chapter contradict his early “objective” refutation of the terms “endangered languages” and language “obsolescence” and his plea to simply subsume such processes under the label of “language shift” (p. 17). I take this contradiction as a piece of evidence that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for field researchers to remain “neutral” while the speech communities they have been researching have to cope with existential problems — in the strict sense of the term.

The book ends with six pages of endnotes to the chapters (I will never understand why a publisher like Cambridge University Press prefers endnotes to footnotes), an appendix with the author’s “Ritual-speech survey of twelve-year-olds [sic] students 1979–1994” (pp. 162–164), the references (pp. 165–175), and an eight-page index (which — unfortunately — does not list the Weyewa technical terms for their various forms of ritual speech).

There are a number of typos (besides the ones already marked in the quotes above): p. x: Figure 1: read “page xviii” for “page xvi”; p. 11: read: “In his dictionary ... he emphasized the coherence of Sumbanese languages as a unit by including ...” for “In his dictionary ... he emphasized the coherence of Sumbanese languages as a unit in his dictionary by including ...”; p. 19: read “to effectively support” for “to effectively to support” and “speakers are more or less aware” for “speakers age more or less aware”; on pages 20 and 21 Kuipers most probably refers to an earlier version of his book — thus read: “chapter 4” for “chapter 3,” “chapter 5” for “chapter 4,” and “chapter 6” for “chapter 5”; p. 34: read “they have been elevated” for “they have have been elevated”, p. 44: what about the status of *lawiti* given its definition in table 1 on page 37?; p. 109: read: “for his father’s boldness” for “for his fathers’ boldness”; p. 148: read “strategies” for “stratEgies,” p. 171: read “Mächte und Mythen” for “Machte und Mythen.” Moreover, given the fact that this monograph is published in a series called “Studies in the Social and Cultural Foundations of Language,” I cannot understand that such a famous linguist as Otto Jespersen has to be characterized in the quote from Berg on p. 136 as “[a well known structuralist linguist]” — can’t we take it for granted any more that readers of such a book know about

such a famous researcher — and if not, what does this imply for the quality of the scientific education we provide or have been providing for our students so far??? To mention another point of criticism: it is very difficult to understand that an experienced field researcher like Kuipers does not realize that a behavior he reports — namely swinging his microphone toward a young boy who was actually speaking off-stage during a ritual speech performance but — because of the field researcher's action — was suddenly “having the spotlight on him” (p. 131f.) — was absolutely inappropriate in this situation and caused much embarrassment for the boy and his relatives. Moreover, every interested reader will miss a general discussion and a definition of the concept of “ritual speech” — one of the central topics of this monograph. And last but not least, I was terribly disappointed that this book does not provide the reader with more original data of Weyewa ritual speech. What is even more disappointing is the fact that the few linguistic data given are not even presented in a morpheme-interlinear transcription. We field-researchers are aware of the fact that we cannot collect data without theory — but we should convince our editors and publishers that we cannot theorize without data, either!

To sum up: despite the shortcomings just mentioned, this is an interesting book on “the changing nature of ritual speech on the island of Sumba,” which offers a new and quite promising perspective on how to look at processes of language and culture change.

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## References

Kuipers, Joel C. (1990). *Power in Performance: The Creation of Textual Authority in Weyewa Ritual Speech*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Michael G. Smith: *Language and Power in the Creation of the USSR, 1917–1953*. Contributions to the Sociology of Language 80. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1998. vi + 294 pp.

This book is a critical examination of official Soviet linguistic policy in the period from the Russian Revolution to Stalin's death in 1953. The book is divided into eight chapters grouped into four parts, in addition to an Introduction (pp. 1–13) and a Conclusion (pp. 175–180). Part I, “Historical challenges,” includes chapters on “Democracy and language

in late imperial Russia” (pp. 15–33) and “Divided speech communities of the Soviet Union” (pp. 35–58); Part II, “Theoretical approaches,” includes “G. G. Shpet, linguistic structure, and the Eurasian imperative in Soviet language reform” (pp. 59–80) and “N. Ia. Marr, language history, and the Stalin cultural revolution” (pp. 81–102); Part III, “Practical experiments,” includes “Mass mobilizing for Russian literacy: scripts, grammar and style” (pp. 103–119) and “‘A revolution for the east’: Latin alphabets and their polemics” (pp. 121–142); Part IV, “Stalinist solutions,” includes “The official campaign for Russian language culture” (pp. 143–160) and “Stalin’s linguistic theories as cultural conquest” (pp. 161–173). The volume closes with abbreviations and acronyms (pp. 181–183), Notes (pp. 185–223), Archival sources (pp. 225–228), References (pp. 229–286), and Index (pp. 287–294). The usual way of presenting bibliographical references, incidentally, is a note number in the text, which leads to one of the notes toward the back of the book, which in turn includes an author/date or equivalent reference that must be sought in the list of references, all of this requiring a fair amount of manual dexterity on the part of the reader.

The book follows three main strands of Soviet linguistic policy against the background of political changes. First, attention is paid to the Russian language, in particular mother-tongue education in Russian-language schools, though also the teaching and spread of Russian among the non-Russian-speaking population of the Soviet Union. A question of particular importance here is spelling reform, including the major reform officially implemented in 1918. Another question treated within this rubric is the teaching of literacy in Russian, with special emphasis on the shift from more experimental methods in the early Soviet period to more traditional methods from the late 1930s (p. 161). Second, official policy relating to relations among the various languages of the Soviet Union is discussed, including the practice in the early Soviet period (roughly to the 1930s) of devising writing systems for some 60 languages using the Latin alphabet, followed by a period in which these languages had their writing systems shifted to Russian Cyrillic; the question of whether neologisms should be introduced primarily through loans from Russian, a policy that clearly and explicitly triumphed from the 1930s; and of course the question of the relative positions of Russian as the “language of interethnic communication” and of local languages in the Soviet Union. The third strand is the development of linguistics in the Soviet Union, including of course the aberrations of the Marrist period from the late 1930s to the early 1950s, with its claim that different stages in language evolution match the different stages of Marxist economic evolution.



The strength of the book is in its analysis of the political side. Access to archival material that was not open to outside inspection during the Soviet period has meant that much hitherto unavailable material has been used, with the result that it is now sometimes possible to pinpoint particular changes in official policy much more accurately than was the case heretofore. And while some aspects of the interrelation between Soviet linguistics and Soviet linguistic policies were reasonably well known before, such as the role of Marrism, the albeit temporary important influence of some other linguists and schools had been largely neglected, such as G. G. Shpet (pages 59–65) and Eurasianism, with its denial or at least deemphasis of the linguistic ties between Russian and Indo-European and the emphasis on Russian's ties to the East. Smith succeeds in demonstrating the at times intricate links between linguistic theories, political ideology and linguistic policies, and certainly my own understanding of some of the details of these interactions has been clarified, for instance the precise reasons for the attractiveness of Marr's theories, which stemmed not only from the apparent correlation of linguistic and Marxist economic evolution, but also from the importance of his notion of linguistic "cross-breeding" for utopian ideas concerning the eventual fusing of all languages into a single international language (pp. 87–88).

The side of the discussion that is slighted in presentation is, unfortunately, the structure of language. In contrast to such works as Comrie (1981) and Comrie et al. (1996) — both, incidentally, cited in the references, the latter in the form of its 1978 predecessor — hardly any actual examples of linguistic forms are presented in the book, and even the few that are presented are not without error, as in the item *galif* (for the correct form *galife*), glossed 'riding breaches' (page 117) — though at least some principle of linguistic equality seems to have determined that the English translation (for 'riding breeches') should also be flawed, and errors of this kind do not, of course, affect the argument. There are other instances where linguists will find linguistic definitions vaguely familiar but hardly adequate, as when a phoneme is defined as "the letter sign in languages which carries and distinguishes meaning, apart from the many distinctive features of sounds" (page 19); presumably the linguistically initiated already know what a phoneme is, but this definition will not serve to enlighten other readers. And this is unfortunate, since one of the main recurring debates relating to Russian spelling that is discussed in the volume is the potential conflict between the phonetic (linguists would rather say: phonemic) and the morphological principles, one of whose main manifestations in Russian is the decision not to represent in writing the neutralization of unstressed vowels, that is, triumph of the morphological principle. (Belarusian spelling, interestingly, does represent this

neutralization in spelling.) A few choice examples and a clearer presentation of the principles would have aided readers who are not already familiar with the principles and their application to Russian.

With regard to the non-Russian languages of the Soviet Union, one finds similar unfortunate wordings, as when vowel harmony is introduced in the sentence “[a]s a unique characteristic of the Turkic sound system, it [i.e. vowel harmony — BC] dictated the need for a rather large vowel system in order to provide matching sets of vowels within and between words” (page 132). Vowel harmony is, of course, far from unique to Turkic languages; indeed even among the languages of the former Soviet Union it is also found, for instance, in some Uralic languages and in Chukchi. Turkic languages typically get by with eight or nine vowel phonemes, hardly a large number by world standards, and well below the number of vowel phonemes in standard varieties of English or French. And the number of vowel phonemes is in principle independent of the existence of vowel harmony. Smith’s discussion of vowel harmony is part of a discussion of the choice of standard variety for Uzbek, where there was a real controversy over whether the standard should be based on the southern dialects, with a nine-vowel system, or the northern dialects (including that of the more Russianized capital Tashkent), which are at least analyzed conventionally as having a six-vowel system, with the six-vowel system eventually triumphing in 1934 (p. 136). But this was primarily a polemic over the choice of dialect base, rather than, as suggested by Smith, an issue over vowel harmony and Russian loanwords — other Turkic languages with clearly eight- or nine-vowel systems succeeded then as now in incorporating Russian loans. Now, in the history of Soviet language policies, linguistically erroneous claims were often made as arguments in favor of a particular position, and Smith may be right in implying that this was the case here. (For another instance, consider the claim discussed by Comrie [1981: 32–33] that the Cyrillic alphabet, having more letters than the Latin alphabet, is better suited for representing languages with a larger number of phonemes, without recourse to diacritics or special letters. In fact, the Cyrillic and Latin alphabets do about equally well, despite the disparity in number of letters — 33 versus 26 — because much of the additional number in Cyrillic is designed to deal with rather parochial problems of Russian phonology, such as the phonemic opposition between palatalized and nonpalatalized consonants, that are rarely relevant in the non-Slavic languages of the Soviet Union.) Thus, overall in evaluating the claims of Soviet language policies with regard to the advantages and disadvantages of specific policies, it is necessary to have a clear description and analysis of the linguistic structures at issue. Only then can one distinguish genuine arguments based on linguistic structures

from pseudo-arguments, although of course one is still left with the more difficult problem of deciding whether the advocates of a particular pseudo-argument advanced that argument through ignorance or by deceit.

Since the sole aim of this book is to discuss language policy in the Soviet Union, it is perhaps not unreasonable that there is little or no comparison with the rest of the world. And indeed, much of the specific politicization of language policy in the period under discussion seems unique to the Soviet Union and its closest satellites, where advocacy of a particular linguistic approach could lead to one's being branded as a leftwing deviationist or a bourgeois nationalist, and to imprisonment. But many of the problems that were being discussed are problems that are very much alive in other parts of the world. For instance, the furor in Germany that has surrounded a recent rather mild spelling reform of German (effective 1998) shows that spelling reform in democratic societies can equally unleash political backlashes; much of the discussion of controversies surrounding mother-tongue education in Russian-language schools will be familiar to those who follow the debate between "conservatives" and "liberals" with regard to mother-tongue education in the English-speaking world; the rights of minority languages are as much a subject of political debate, including political violence, in the world today as they were in the Soviet Union; and even where minority languages are guaranteed legal status, questions of the relationship to the majority language remain controversial, such as adoption or rejection of orthographic systems close to that of the majority language, or adoption or rejection of loan vocabulary from the majority language. This perspective would emphasize that there were real linguistic problems requiring practical solutions in the Soviet Union, rather than seeing events as driven purely by political concerns.

The volume draws to a close in 1953, the year of Stalin's death and clearly an important watershed in Soviet cultural history. Certainly linguistics as a science adopted a more normal appearance after the vagaries of Marrism. But, contrary to the suggestion on page 176, even in the later Soviet Union formalist and structural approaches remained an object of some suspicion, with many of those recognized as leading practitioners continuing their work outside the Russian linguistic establishment or in emigration. While one might agree that the survival of the major languages of the Soviet Union was guaranteed largely independently of official policies (pp. 179–180), one should equally note that both some small languages that were provided with official support and some that were denied such support or had such support withdrawn (Comrie 1981: 25–27) have nonetheless become moribund. Even if the dynamics of

language development and interaction were largely independent of the specifics of official Soviet policy, the results in individual cases have been different depending on local circumstances.

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