KENNETH L. PIKE

Upon the death of Charles Fries, Kenneth Pike wrote 'A shade tree has fallen' (1997.4:201). Now this phrase must refer to Pike himself.[1]

Pike has already been honored in many ways. He was president of LSA in 1961, and received a number of honorary degrees, was a member of the National Academy of Sciences. The many diverse branches of his studies, life, writings, thoughts, deeds, and character have reached far indeed. It is impossible to do justice to these in any significant detail, and the degree to which his contributions have been felt has already been recognized by many. This then is a very personal attempt to summarize just a few of his branches.[2]

It is impossible to isolate Pike's linguistics and his life aims, so I will not attempt to do so here. Early in his life it was obvious to all that he was a 'natural' linguist. Having joined the Wycliffe Bible Translators (and later its sister organization the Summer Institute of Linguistics) after graduating from Gordon College and being rejected for missionary service in China (on the basis of his health), he began to study the Mixteco language in Mexico. With scanty informal training, he found to his surprise that he was attempting to analyze a tonal language, and he proceeded to do so with remarkable ability.[3]

Recognizing Pike's abilities, W. Cameron Townsend, his director in Wycliffe, arranged for him to attend early LSA institutes at the University of Michigan—where personal contacts with Bloomfield, Bloch, Sapir, Fries, Twaddell, Hockett, and many others were to permanently influence him.[4]

Charles Fries became Pike's mentor, and was influential in his completing a PhD in linguistics at Michigan, as well as obtaining positions there. Pike's dissertation on phonetics was one of the outstanding dissertations of its time. First published in 1943, and translated into a number of other languages, *Phonetics* is still in print—a remarkable achievement of longevity! After graduation Pike was appointed to the faculty, with a unique arrangement of oscillation between teaching on the campus and frequent leaves-of-absence to do fieldwork in Mexico (and later, elsewhere, helping his Wycliffe/SIL colleagues with their problems in the analyses of indigenous languages throughout the world).[5]

[1] Pike passed away on Dec. 31, 2000 in Dallas, Texas at the age of 88, from a heart attack, with other complications. I am grateful to Richard W. Bailey and Alton L. Becker for comments and contributions to this obituary.

[2] My personal contact with Prof. Pike has been extensive—as secretary, student, research assistant, co-editor, bibliographer, friend, and friend of his family. Working with him was a privilege, and great fun. Each day brought surprise, respect, inquiry, and laughter.

[3] This analysis and his contacts and consultation with his sister Eunice (who was endeavoring to analyze Mazatec, another tonal language in a different language family) resulted in the publication of his *Tone languages* (1948).

[4] There are many tales of Pike as a sort of wunderkind at these institutes, and of his teaching many of his teachers to produce 'weird sounds' such as glottalized stops.

[5] During the Second World War, assigned to work on the intonation of English, Pike used a pitchpipe to sound out different intonational tunes. His English Language Institute colleagues soon insisted that this

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Besides his teaching duties, Pike served briefly as chair of the Linguistics Department and director of the English Language Institute at Michigan, and also as president of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, directing its summer courses at the University of Oklahoma for many years.

In SIL, Pike at first devoted himself strictly to phonology, and published a good deal on that area, including *Phonemics* (1947a)—widely used in classrooms for years after its appearance. At the SIL summer courses, Pike took over the leadership of the grammatical work after Eugene Nida's departure for the American Bible Society's translation department. His turn to grammar did not begin here, of course—he had, for example, already written his now classic paper 'Grammatical prerequistes to phonemic analysis' (1947b). Contrary to the post-Bloomfieldians, he strongly disagreed that one should finish describing phonetics and phonemics before turning to morphology, and still later, syntax, leaving semantics as something outside of linguistics proper. His early tagmemic formulation posited three hierarchies (phonology, grammar, lexicon) which, although separate, had many intersecting relationships between them which also had to be specified.

Pike and colleagues finished translating the New Testament into Mixteco in the late 1940s, after which he spent his leaves from the university mainly consulting on indigenous language analyses in South America, Africa, India, and Indonesia. His alternation between teaching and fieldwork resulted in a useful relationship between the two occupations. Rarely, if ever, would you find Pike making false universal statements about language features, and, during this time he was undoubtedly the only linguist with such extensive and varied language contact. Pike's varied experience shaped tagmemic theory into an extremely useful tool for on-the-spot language analyses, and it is still used as such by many. Literally hundreds of items have been published within that theory, some of which are included in bibliographies of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (and see Brend 1972a&b, 1974a&b). The extensive first tagmemic source, Pike's *Language in relation to a unified theory of the structure of human behavior*, first appeared as three volumes (1954, 1955, 1960); the second revised version appeared in 1967. Continued studies in that theory occupied Pike for more than thirty years.

Eunice Pike (Kenneth Pike's sister) specialized in tagmemic phonology and also published widely on that area (see 1962, 1976); in addition, Pike's wife Evelyn, became well known as an explicator and teacher of tagmemic grammar, and joined him as co-author of a number of related publications (e.g., Pike & Pike 1982).

In later years, Pike saw his etic-emic distinction, though first applied primarily to language, widely applied to behavior by cultural anthropologists (see Headland, Pike, & Harris 1990). This was not surprising since Pike had always felt that language was but one aspect of behavior. Although he found the etic-emic distinctions of some anthropologists to be different from his own, he was delighted that these related concepts were being used so widely. Scholars in other disciplines (ethnology, psychology, and music, for example) have also used a number of tagmemic factors.

Throughout his life, Pike branched out into a good number of peripheral areas: historical linguistics (1951), rhetoric (Pike et al. 1970), language teaching and learning (1963), philosophy of language (1982). He also published a set of five volumes of poems (1997).

practice be prohibited in the general offices, and banished him and his pipe to a soundproof closet in the elegant Rackham graduate building.

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It is difficult to place Pike in the linguistic world. He was never part of the mainstream, though always keenly aware of it. He was more influenced by Sapir than by Bloomfield, though he accepted many Bloomfieldian concepts. He differed seriously with the MIT school, especially about the inclusion of deep structure in early formulations of the theory, and, as mentioned above, he believed in a separate generation of phonology and grammar. He found much compatibility in the works of M. A. K. Halliday and Sydney Lamb. It is quite possible that Pike was the first to insist that the description of small grammatical units (e.g. words, morphemes) was not complete until discourse factors were included. (Discourse was a major object of his study for some time.) His insights were often recognized and accepted by others long after they were published. Ray Jackendoff, for example, in a recent talk at the University of Michigan said that he now believes that phonology and grammar should be separately derived.

Pike was also a great teacher, especially of advanced graduate students. One of them, Alton L. Becker, describes Pike as

> an extraordinary teacher. He taught us by giving us problems to solve at all levels, and in solving them we'd gain first-hand insight into the nature of language. How does one understand a distant language? How do one's prior assumptions get in the way of understanding? What can we assume about units, constituencies, functions as we face the problems of describing another language?
>
> We learned the importance of good phonetics and how to work with helpers—not informants—and avoid questions like 'How do you say X in your language?' When I was at an advanced level he set me to studying Navaho verbs—because it was tough and would test some new ideas he had about using mathematical matrices in grammatical analysis [see Pike & Becker 1964]. He gave his time freely for long and intense talks about this and other topics, talks which ended only when Evelyn would phone and ask him to come home for dinner.
>
> I learned many Pikean phrases that his students will recall: Person before logic. Observer Bias. Most linguists are right in what they affirm but wrong in what they deny. The first law of mathematics is always invert. There's no accounting for taste, said the old lady as she kissed the cow. And my favorite, which he attributed to his forest-ranger brother, Never get into a pissing match with a skunk.
>
> When, along with Richard Young, we did a book on rhetoric (Pike, Young, & Becker 1970), it was heuristics, I think, which excited him most, procedures for inquiry and solving problems, never automatic but useful, and Usefulness is one of the tests for Truth, he'd say.
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> I long have thought of him as the last of the New England Transcendentalists. Like Ralph Waldo Emerson, he was deeply religious but an original observer of nature, too. For both, language was an aspect of nature.
>
> But perhaps more like Charles Sanders Peirce, also deeply religious, whose architechtonic theory of semiotics always seemed, at root, isomorphic with Pike's Tagmemics. Peirce's Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness is very close to Pike's Particle, Wave, and Field. Both thought in multiple perspectives of three: the unit in itself, in time and space, and in the context of other units.
>
> To call him the last of anything is wrong, however. He was, for many students, the first and most original thinker we would encounter.
>
> Many times I have been asked, What is Tagmemics, anyway?
>
> The best answer I know is, it was the contents of Kenneth Pike's extraordinary mind. He wrote down a lot of it, in many different places, but I suspect there was a lot more. In writing up solutions of problems for him, there was to be a final section called Residue, in which we confronted the problems we had not solved. He could always add to the list.

Another important part of Pike's campus activities was his thrice weekly participation in 'wild' water polo games with faculty, townspeople and student members of the Flounders Club. He enjoyed these games thoroughly and was well known as one of the fiercest competitors.

For as long as it was possible after his retirement from the university, Pike and his wife travelled to the far corners of the globe, holding workshops and consulting with their SIL colleagues. Later, they remained at the SIL center in Dallas. Pike lectured for a while at the University of Texas, Arlington, as well as at the center itself, and

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consulted with field workers. In his latter years, hearing and memory problems slowed him down considerably, although he continued to enjoy contacts with friends and family, including his much beloved wife, three children, three grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

It is impossible for me to write of Pike without mentioning his deep faith in God—which pervaded every aspect of his life. He published much in this area, beginning with a book of essays entitled *With heart and mind* (1962), and concluding with a five-volume set of informal poems (1997). In the poems one can read of his hopes, humor, longings, and motivation for living.

He was certainly a 'God's truth' linguist, believing that structure actually is in language, although also insisting strongly that no observer of language has a corner on knowledge, and that God alone can see the whole of reality. Feeling that service to God was all-important, he often worked long into the night with his colleagues in the jungles, feeling that a useful translation of the Scriptures was at stake. He very much wanted to live a life of gratitude to God.

It is rare indeed for a linguist to have such a strong influence over so long a period of time. Kenneth Pike will surely be missed, and scholars for years to come will continue to discover his insights in his writings. In commenting on one of his poems (1997.4: 193) he wrote 'To ''finish the course'' . . . is a major aim of mine.' He did indeed finish that course well.[6] [Ruth M. Brend, *Michigan State University*]

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[6] Because Pike's contributions to linguistics have been so many and varied, it is impossible to list a full bibliography here (my 1987 bibliography is fairly complete up to that date). Further information on his publications can be obtained from the Summer Institute of Linguistics (www.sil.org).

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