

Descriptive studies of particular languages

English

94–349 Putseys, Yvan (Catholic U. of Brussels). The world's languages – how many speakers? *English Today* (Cambridge), **9**, 4 (1993), 4–12.

Estimates of how many people speak a given language are problematic for several reasons, including incompleteness and unreliability of census data, political tampering with data, and inconsistent definitions of language and dialect and of first and second languages. Lists of the world's 'major' languages in various reference books are reviewed and inaccuracies and inconsistencies pointed out, such as the disregarding of German speakers in countries where German is not the official language.

Figures for English may be inflated, by overestimates of its use in India and elsewhere, as part of a new linguistic imperialism. A new way of ranking languages is suggested, by combining rankings on 'number of speakers' and 'countries with this native language'. When this formula is used, Spanish emerges as the top language, English and Mandarin are equal second, followed by Arabic, Russian and Hindi.

Irish

94–350 Ó Riagáin, Pádraig (Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann). Stability and change in public attitudes towards Irish since the 1960s. *Teangeolas* (Dublin, Ireland), **32** (1993), 45–9.

This is a survey of nine surveys carried out since the 1960s into attitudes to and the use of Irish. Although evidence from the 1960s is rather sparse and the surveys tended to word questions differently (except those of 1973 and 1983), the conclusion, to the surprise of the author, is that despite extensive economic and social changes in Ireland since 1960, there is a degree of continuity and stability in

language attitudes. While there are substantial minorities of those in favour of Irish- or English-only policies, the majority would prefer bilingual policies (though they would rather just see Irish taught as a school subject than for a compulsory exam). As far as the use of Irish in social situations is concerned, there would appear to have been a slight decline between 1973 and 1983.

Translation

94–351 Lindenfeld, Jacqueline (Southern Oregon State Coll.). The cross-cultural translation of linguistic routines. *Babel* (Budapest, Hungary), **39**, 3 (1993), 151–7.

The language forms used by market traders in France and California, shouting to advertise their produce, are compared. The author's literal translation of a French example – 'Look at the produce today, lady, eh... one kilo for ten francs, let's go' – contrasts with the Californian 'All fresh and sweet, a dollar a pound...'. Analysis of a transcribed corpus confirms a systematic difference – the Californians use more nouns, the French more verbs and terms of address and far more interjections and imperatives. These results are in line with those of Coulmas and

Herbert for other speech acts and languages, and support Coulmas' claim that the cross-cultural equivalence of routine formulae is very unlikely.

How is a translator to deal with such routines? The author has so far preferred literal translation to draw attention to the differences, but now believes, with Nida, that such a translation may be 'overloaded', and that a free translation – 'Nice produce today... Ten francs a kilo' – is more culturally relevant to a U.S. reader.



Lexicography

94–352 **Cowie, Anthony** (U. of Leeds). Getting to grips with phrasal verbs. *English Today* (Cambridge), **9**, 4 (1993), 38–41.

This is an account of one of the most problematic areas of ELT, and relates to the author's work on the *Oxford Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs*. The initial discussion of the need to distinguish between idiomatic and non-idiomatic use shows how this can be done by simple tests, which have to do with meaning rather than grammar. Then follows a description of the development of dictionary work, starting with Ronald Mackin's realisation in the

1950s that entries should be illustrated by quotations to show the use of phrasal verbs in context. Collocates were also included. More recently, the computerisation of corpora and computer-generated concordances have greatly assisted the dictionary compiler's task, though there remains the limitation that the computer can only recognise a word, not its grammatical function.