

González Núñez, Gabriel. 2016. *Translating in Linguistically Diverse Societies: Translation Policy in the United Kingdom*. Benjamins Translation Library 125. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 289 pp. ISBN 978-90-272-5871-7 (hb). €95, \$143. ISBN 978-90-272-6674-3 (eb). €95, \$143.

In the author's words, this timely and wide-ranging study explores the "link between language and identity in a world where states are powerful regulatory agents in the lives of all individuals" (xiv). González Núñez's overall aim is to persuade readers that a "just" society should "actively develop" its translation policy, while demonstrating how complex and challenging it is to do this in practice via the example of the United Kingdom (xiv). The UK is an apposite choice, given its superdiversity and the high number of different languages spoken (Vertovec 2007), but it is also a brave one, in the context of the looming Brexit and possible break-up of the four nations which currently unite to make up the kingdom.

A short Preface first outlines the genesis of the book in the author's personal experience as a foreign student at an American university, when state language policy was being put to the vote in Utah. The first chapter, "Some history between language and state" then introduces the key themes in the text: language and translation policy, the political dimension of language policy, the role of the state, immigration, and majority and minority languages. Chapter Two, "Translation anyone? A look at the debate on language rights" is a whistle-stop tour of key concepts in language rights across an impressive range of disciplines, including economics, law and political science as well as the more familiar debates from translation studies. By approaching issues of translation (used here in the broad sense, to include interpreting and cross-cultural communication) from the point of view of language rights, the author highlights various novel and important aspects of the relationship between the two.

Chapter Three, “Going about it: Method and rationale” outlines how the research was conducted, including data collection methods, and (somewhat belatedly, perhaps) provides useful definitions of the main concepts under discussion. Chapter Four, “From the Geneva Conventions to the latest EU Directives: State obligations to translate under international law” gives an admirably clear, detailed and well-illustrated overview of the international legal framework which applies in the UK, for now at least; but also, evidently, to many other states where issues of language policy are important. Given the understandable need to situate any discussion of language policy in its international legal context, it is only in Chapter Five, “A kingdom of English and many other languages as well: Linguistic background of the United Kingdom” that the author’s attention turns directly to the subject of the study, the UK. A discussion of “old and new minority languages” in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales is the main focus in this chapter, which attempts to define the linguistic composition of each of the four UK nations. Chapter Six, “Broadly speaking: Legislation and policy that affect translation generally in the United Kingdom” then outlines language policy and legislation at the UK level before exploring relevant “regional and local” policies. Scottish and Welsh readers may prefer their policies to be considered “national”, not “regional”; but the political dimension of such terminology is not discussed here. Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine then focus respectively on translation and language policy/practice in three different public contexts: local government, healthcare, and judicial settings, with strong attention to detail. Chapter Ten, “So what does this all mean? A conclusion to a study on translation policy,” by the author’s admission (9), “stray[s] somewhat from the mainly descriptive approach employed” throughout the text in favour of a more theoretical, engaged and even polemical discussion of the role of translation and broader issues of integration and inclusion, notably by problematising the concepts of ‘old minority languages and new minority languages’ (215).

Reading this work from cover to cover as a reviewer could have seemed a pretty dry academic pursuit in different times. Today, in the context of Brexit Britain, the author's forensic scrutiny instead seems urgent and necessary. *Translating in Linguistically Diverse Societies* draws on extensive research and scholarship across different disciplines, including history, international relations, law, politics and translation studies. González Núñez can thus tease out the precise level(s) where authority, protections and rights are based, and explains carefully where their limits lie. Copious references are provided to the original treaties, statutory documents and so on, and there are very helpful illustrations of actual events, context and usage throughout. The work may serve to record for posterity the high tide of protections and rights in the UK as a linguistically diverse society, with the international, European, national and regional frameworks all currently in an extreme state of flux. Awareness of this makes reading the book a thought-provoking and sometimes somber experience. You don't know what you've got till it's gone.

The reader's task can nonetheless be heavy going at times. Some sections are little more than descriptive lists, probably intended for those who are dipping in to check facts and definitions, and it is tricky to keep on top of the many acronyms ("Where the FCNM does seem to reach beyond the ICCPR and the ECHR is in Article 10, paragraph 2", 77) without constantly flicking back to the - somewhat inconsistent - list at the beginning of the book. A particular frustration is the publisher's apparent disregard for the value of a decent editor. In common with other works in the Benjamins Translation Library series, which is presumably targeted at the sort of readers who care about these things, typos and other basic errors abound (on the very first page, "in multilingual [sic] contexts these issues come up. And when they do, translation tends to be brough [sic] up", xiii; and on the next page, "the need to think about translation in multilingual societies cannot be *understated*" (my emphasis), xiv). For the law or

translation student, though, the descriptive approach and lists at least are likely to be welcome, especially given the previous dearth of clear information on these topics. Readers who are more interested in the big questions raised by this study will particularly enjoy the Conclusion, where the author adopts a refreshingly engaged and challenging tone.

Overall, the book effectively addresses a significant gap in our understanding, acknowledged in the recent decision by the European Language Council to establish a working party on this very topic, which is now beginning the detailed work of cataloguing the diverse rights and policies in place across the continent. Inside the UK itself, new research projects (such as the one on language policy led by the Arts and Humanities Research Council Leadership Fellow in Modern Languages, Janice Carruthers) are also likely to amplify and extend this work. Two very positive features of González Núñez's contribution are first, that it is likely to inspire similar research on other linguistically diverse societies, opening the way for new international comparative perspectives; and second, that it outlines critically the research approach he adopted, effectively providing a suitable toolkit for any such further studies.

References

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