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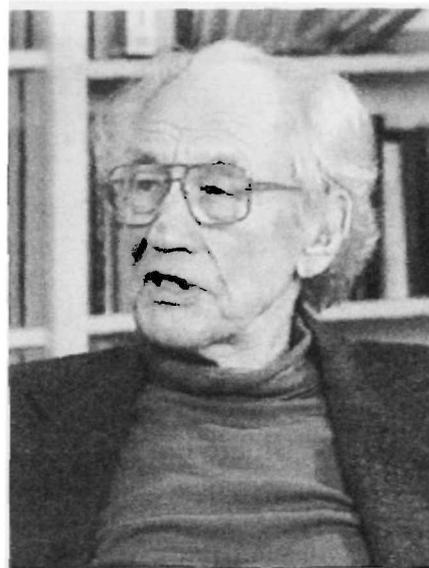
Kenneth L. Pike in 1998

Kenneth Lee Pike (1912–2000)

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Kenneth L. Pike, aged 88, internationally recognized linguist, educator, and Christian thinker, died in Dallas, Texas, on December 31, 2000, after a brief illness of only five days. Evelyn Griset Pike, his wife and closest friend since their marriage in 1938, and their oldest daughter, Judith, were at his side.

Dr. Pike was born in East Woodstock, Connecticut, on June 9, 1912, the seventh of eight children of a country doctor. He received his bachelor's degree in 1933 from Gordon College (then in Boston). In 1935 he joined SIL and served in Mexico studying Amerindian languages. He received his Ph.D. in linguistics at the University of Michigan in 1942 under Charles Fries—Bloomfield was also on his dissertation committee—and later served for 30 years on the U. Michigan faculty. Pike was the recipient of ten honorary doctorates/professorships from universities around the world, including the University of Chicago, Université René Descartes, the University of Lima, and Albert-Ludwigs University in Freiburg, Germany. His leadership included serving as President of the Linguistic Society of America, President of the Linguistic Association of Canada and the United States, and from 1942 to 1979, President of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (now SIL International). He was chair of the University of Michigan Linguistics Department from 1975 to 1977 and director of the English Language Institute at U. Michigan at the same time. For a quarter of a century he divided his time between U. Michigan and SIL, as Director of the SIL school at the University of Oklahoma and helping to establish other SIL schools around the world. He lectured in 42 countries and studied well over a hundred indigenous
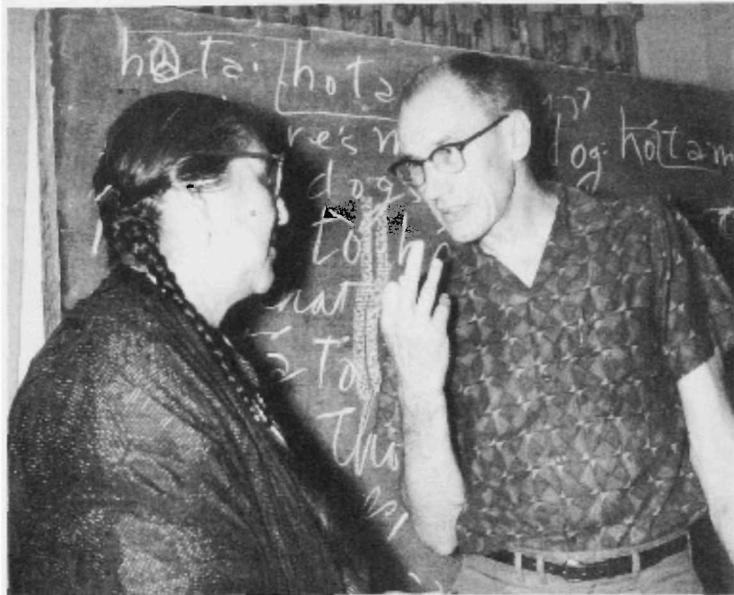
Doing a monolingual demonstration in Cheyenne with Helen Spottedhorse at the University of Oklahoma, 1963.

languages in the field, including languages in Australia, Bolivia, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Ecuador, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nepal, New Guinea, Nigeria, Peru, the Philippines, Sudan, and Togo.

Ken Pike's contributions to the field of linguistics combined with his dedication to the minority peoples of the world brought him numerous honors. He was recipient of the Presidential Medal of Merit from the Philippines and the Dean's Medal at Georgetown University. He was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for fifteen years in a row and for the Templeton Prize three times. At the time of his death he was a member of the National Academy of Sciences and the American Anthropological Association, Professor Emeritus of the University of Michigan, and President Emeritus of the SIL. At least 21 encyclopedias have published entries on him. Dr. Pike published 20 books, 200 academic articles, and over a thousand poems. For a complete list of his publications up to 1987, see Brend (1987); for a near complete list up to the year 1997, see www.sil.org/acpub/biblio/. His last trip overseas was to Irian Jaya, Indonesia, in 1995, where he was the plenary speaker at the International Conference on New Guinea Languages at Cenderawasih University. He was actively lecturing and writing until 1997, when his health required him to slow down. His last book publication was his five-volume set of poems (Pike 1997a); he published three articles in 1998 (1998a, 1998b, 1998c) and two in 1999 (1999a, [1996]1999b). He had just completed a historical essay on "Early American Anthropological Linguistics" the month before his death (Pike 2001).

Dr. Pike's life can be seen in patterns of decades, each producing publications in its disciplines. During the 1940s, his emphasis was on the sounds of languages: phonetics and phonemics, tone and intonation. The 1950s focused on anthropology and language in relation to culture, develop-

ing his holistic view. The 1960s involved mathematics, and the 1970s were devoted to grammatical analysis. During the 1980s, Pike developed his areas of interest in philosophy, publishing his book *Talk, Thought, and Thing* (1993). His website is at www.sil.org/klp. *Current Anthropology* published "An Interview with Kenneth Pike" in 1994 (Kaye 1994), in which Ken shares publicly for the first time some of his own personal experiences in academia.

Pike's Contribution to Linguistics

Pike's major *theoretical* contribution in linguistics was his development of tagmemics, an important theory in American linguistics until the paradigm shift toward Noam Chomsky's transformational grammar theory in the 1960s. Pike's magnum opus on tagmemic theory was first published in three volumes in 1954, 1955, and 1960, and then in a second edition in 1967. For those not willing to work through this mammoth 762-page volume, Pike later wrote a popularized version of just 146 pages that explains his theory at a level undergraduate students can handle. Subtitled *An Introduction to Tagmemics* (1982), and translated into Japanese, Korean, and Spanish, it became his most popular theoretical treatise. His most widely used book, though, and a true classic, is his *Phonetics* (1943). Published almost sixty years ago, it is still in print and used as a text in courses today.

Pike's *practical* contribution in linguistics was in his amazing ability to train so many students to learn, analyze, and publish data on unwritten minority languages. One of his major goals was to help colleagues with their linguistic challenges. To that end, he established linguistic workshops around the world, in which he and his junior colleagues helped thousands of field researchers and Bible translators with difficult analytical challenges in aboriginal languages. When Pike first went to live with the Mixtec people in southern Mexico in 1935, he knew no Spanish, nor did the San Miguel Mixtecs. So he began learning their language monolingually, since there was no common language. This method eventually developed into his famous pedagogical "monolingual approach" for learning hitherto unknown tribal languages. Who would have guessed then that there were some four to five thousand such languages spoken around the world, that were unidentified even to linguists in the 1940s? This holistic approach to language learning became Pike s trademark. He eventually taught thousands of his students how to learn such languages, many of them by using the method that he demonstrated countless times in his dramatic "monolingual demonstrations" over the decades (explained by Pike [1996]1999b, and described best by Makkai [1986]1998). Today those students have produced thousands of linguistic documents on 1200 indigenous languages in fifty countries. (See www.sil.org/acpub/biblio/ for a bibliography of 12,000

Collecting language data from an Aguaruna man in the Peruvian Amazon in 1956; duplicate photo first published in *Time*, April 30, 1956, p. 32.

academic publications on minority languages and cultures by SIL fieldworkers.) Most of those languages had never been studied before, most are spoken by just a few hundred to a few thousand people, and almost all fall under the category of what is called today "Endangered Languages"—defined as those likely to become extinct in the twenty-first century.

Pike's Contribution to Anthropology

Pike's major contribution in anthropology was his development of the emic/etic concept. First coined by Pike in 1954, the two terms are found in common usage in the vocabularies of most anthropologists today, and the distinction between emics and etics has proved very useful to them. (See Franklin 1997.) In fact, most anthropologists today use insights about the different perceptions of reality of various cultural groups as the principal conceptual tool of their trade. The emic/etic distinction underlies a basic contribution of modern anthropology, a tool for understanding other cultures. Anthropologists make their living at least partly because of their unique ability to make the distinction between emic and etic.

Perhaps the highlight of Pike's role in the American Anthropological Association came in 1988. At the AAA's annual meeting that year in Phoenix, a public debate was scheduled between Pike and Marvin Harris on their differing uses of the emic/etic concept. The debate, which went on for four and a half hours with 600 anthropologists in the audience, was vigorous but cordial. It resulted in a book titled *Emics and Etics: The Insider/Outsider Debate* (Headland, Pike, and Harris 1990). One unforgettable amusing incident occurred during this otherwise serious dialogue. During the discussion period, a man in the audience asked Pike a question. In answering him, Pike was describing an incident that happened to him in Russia, but he could not

remember a name. He then looked out over the audience and suddenly said, "Evelyn, are you out there? Who was that man we had dinner with in Moscow?" Evelyn was sitting in the back of the auditorium. She stood up and said, "Ken, that was Dr. So-and-So." Pike said, "That's right." And he finished answering the question. The symposium moderator then went to the microphone to call on the next person, but before he did he said, "Let me stop here, colleagues, to tell you who that was in the back of the room. That was Kenneth Pike's wife, Evelyn Pike, and they are here with us this week celebrating their golden wedding anniversary." Everyone started clapping. Then Dr. Pike, without a moment's hesitation, stood up, leaned across the table, and blew his wife a kiss. The audience, perhaps restless after four hours of sitting, broke forth with cheering and whistles. It was an entertaining moment in a long and otherwise humorless panel that anthropologists still remember thirteen years later.

Pike's Contribution to Religion

Throughout his career, Pike was keenly interested in the religious aspect of his work, as seen in his relationship with Wycliffe Bible Translators. He, Angel Merecías, and Donald Stark completed the translation of the New Testament into the San Miguel Mixtec language in 1951. Pike was above all a Christian philosopher. He was a convinced theist who influenced thousands of people toward religion. He wrote numerous religious articles and books. Such books include *With Heart and Mind* (1996, first edition 1962), and *Mark My Words* (1971). In his book *With Heart and Mind* Ken defended scholarly and intellectual approaches to Christianity, maintaining that Christian faith and academic scholarship can be intimately integrated. As Hugh Steven wrote, "To understand and appreciate Pike, one must know he is both scholar and Christian; that his faith in Christ is at once full of energy, without pretense and rooted in Biblical depth" (1989:16).

Pike Was a Mule!

Ken Pike never had any internal conflict integrating his personal faith in God with his scholarship, or his call to missions with his professorship at Michigan. But this was a problem for some academics who wondered if Pike left his brains at the door when he went to church. Pike wrote his *Heart and Mind* (1996) to help those people understand that he did not. He recently wrote two shorter essays describing his dual calls to missions (1997b) and to linguistics (1998a). And his sister, Eunice Pike (1981), wrote a biography of Ken to explain his unique integration of faith and learning. Pike once told this story to help people understand his role as a Christian scholar:

In 1980 while Evelyn and I were lecturing in China, we were honored at a dinner at Beijing Foreign Studies University. I

was seated next to a Chinese gentleman who had just returned from lecturing at Berkeley. When he learned who I was he said, "Ah yes, I heard about you while I was in the USA. But I also heard you are a missionary. So which are you, a missionary or a linguist?" I thought fast and told him I was a hybrid, a mule. His expression caused me to explain myself. Mules are the result of breeding between a horse, wanted for its speed, and a donkey, wanted for its strength and ability to walk over rocks in the road. When you want to combine the two qualities you have a mule. So sometimes I'm a horse and sometimes I'm a donkey, but I'm always a mule. I am both a missionary and a linguist. [Recorded by Ruth Carr and Ken Pike in 1988; used here with Carr's permission.]

An example of how this played out in Pike's life can be seen in some of the letters he received over the decades from scholars who were influenced by his quiet faith in God. Here is an example, a letter from a Russian scholar who Pike befriended when he was a Fulbright Scholar in Moscow in 1988, before the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991:

Dear Professor Pike, Thank you for your paper.... It is a good contribution to the development of our mentality.... Many innovations are expected here [as a result of recent political upheavals].... Thanks to the depolitization of higher educational establishments, there has appeared a possibility of abolishing [Communist] party meetings, party bureau sittings, and so on.... My loss of belief in [Marxism] caused my sessation from the CP [Communist Party]. Paraphrasing the statement made by Pascal, "There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every person and it can never be filled by any creative thing but can be filled by God we may know through Christ." I must admit that the vacuum formed in my heart is open to Christ but it is not very easy for a former fanatic communist and atheist to make a decision. Your book [he refers here to Pike's biography *Ken Pike: Scholar and Christian*] is especially dear to me now as it depicts the ideal of the Christian gentleman in work and life.... So I am trying to study Christianity and wish I would ever dare to go to Shrebu [pseudonym] Church to be baptised.... I have to queue for hours to buy something eatable or salt cabbage to last through the winter. But man shall not live by bread alone. Yours sincerely. [Written to Kenneth Pike in 1990 from Russia; the original letter was handwritten in English; the spelling here remains as in the original. Words added for clarification are in square brackets.]

Case 75-2: Pike's Organization Accused of Ethnocide

Pike was often criticized in the academic world because of his tagmemic theory. But he was mainly controversial because of his religion and because he was the president of SIL, an organization whose primary aim is the translation of the Bible into preliterate indigenous languages. Pike wrote replies to the public charges against SIL and its sister organization Wycliffe Bible Translators. The first printed criticism of Pike came from David Stoll (1974), now an anthropology professor at Middlebury College, in the *Michigan Daily* when Stoll was just 23 years old. Pike

(1974) replied in the same newspaper. In 1975, some members of the American Anthropological Association filed a formal charge of ethnocide against the SIL to the AAA's Committee on Ethics (COE's "Case 75-2"). In May of that year, the AAA wrote a letter to the SIL describing the complaint and inviting SIL to formally respond. Pike replied to the AAA in a 15-page letter dated May 21. After spending a year investigating the charges, the AAA's COE submitted their report to the AAA Executive Board. The COE decided unanimously in favor of SIL against the complainants. In a letter dated September 20, 1976, to Pike, AAA Executive Director Edward Lehman stated, "At its 85th meeting in May [1976], the [AAA] Executive Board accepted that [COE] recommendation, also by a unanimous vote." The most recent attack from anthropologists, this time accusing SIL of genocide, was published in *Anthropology Newsletter* in 1997 (Edelman 1997). Pike replied also to that, and the AAA published it in a later issue of the *Newsletter* (Pike and Headland 1997). To accuse Pike's students of genocide was so extreme that even long-time SIL critic Stoll (1997) criticized Edelman's editorial.

* * *

Ken Pike was an extraordinary man. He loved life. He had a passion to challenge people to think. He wrote poetry. He laughed. He used his mind to solve linguistic puzzles and share the methods he discovered with others. He was a true scholar, philosopher, poet, pioneer, and author. He was a man who shared his life, knowledge, and love with countless people around the globe. He was a gentleman in the highest sense of the word—an elegant man who noticed and spoke with the most unpretentious person in a crowd; a shy child would catch Ken's eye, and he would engage the child in conversation.

In 1999, SIL began work on what will eventually become the "Kenneth L. Pike Special Collection." When this archival storehouse is completed, it will include thousands of documents on or by Pike, his wife Evelyn, and his sister Dr. Eunice Pike. His correspondence collected here spans almost seventy years. When it is completed, the collection will be open to scholarly academic researchers.

Kenneth Pike is survived by his wife, Evelyn; three adult children, Judith Schram, Barbara Ibach, and Stephen Pike; three grandchildren and two great-grandchildren; and one sister, Eunice V. Pike.

Dr. Pike's poem "The End" expresses the feelings of his students and colleagues.

The End

Regarding Daniel 12:9–13, and "the end of the days."

In tears, then joy!
Life in contrast
Sets the pace
Of learning
Good, through bad . . .

Both now and "then"
Hold to trust,
In God, in time
To light our stars,
Forever there.

[Pike 1997a, volume 2, p. 102]

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