TOPE OMONIYI and JOSHUA A. FISHMAN. *Explorations in the Sociology of Language and Religion*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2006. Pp. viii, 347. Hb €120.00 / US\$162.00.

This volume is described as ‘the first definitive text’ on the new discipline of Sociology of Language and Religion (SLR), whilst the editors claim that it ‘represents only an initial effort to provide an overview of the nature of the interface that is the sociology of language and religion’ (p.4). Although as a named discipline SLR is new, the idea of a connection between language and religion is very old, and bringing together the study of these two fascinating aspects of human society opens up endless possibilities. As its title suggests, this volume explores some of those possibilities, with contributions from every continent, and from a wide range of religions and languages, demonstrating just how vast and varied the field is. Even in highly secularised Western Europe, religion continues to be as essential as language to the development of human society, and this volume explores some of the multiple ways in which the two interact in complex, sometimes unexpected ways.

The 22 chapters are divided into four parts: Effects of Religion on Language; The Mutuality of Language and Religion; Effects of Language on Religion; Language and Religion on Literacy. The majority of contributions are studies of specific instances of interaction between language and religion, the theoretical input being largely restricted to Fishman’s opening chapter, ‘A Decalogue of basic theoretical perspectives for a sociology of language and religion’, in which he proposes a theoretical framework, based on the model of the sociology of language. Omoniyi also offers new concepts for dealing with this new field in his chapter, ‘Societal

multilingualism and multifaithism: a sociology of language and religion perspective'. Omoniyi compares the UK and Nigeria as multinational and multiethnic nations, both 'secular' with a variety of religious practices, and introduces the concept of 'difaithia', generating a model based on Fishman's description of diglossia.

The remaining chapters represent a diverse collection of examples of the interface between language and religion. They offer insights into how language and religion have, at different times and in different contexts, affected the way people live, the way they create and perceive their own identity and that of others. Some chapters offer greater insight than others, some appear to be merely descriptive, and not very enlightening, but of course this perception will depend on the reader's prior knowledge of the subject. The diversity of the volume makes it difficult to make general comments, so I will limit my remarks to some of the chapters I found particularly interesting or informative.

Two very different chapters in Part One offered insight into areas I was unfamiliar with, in a clear and engaging way. Chapter 5, 'Eastern-Christian tradition and the Georgian language' by Tinatin Bolkvadze, and chapter 6, 'Alcoholism and authority: the secularization of the religious' by Kevin McCarron, highlight two very different points in time: the 'Dark Ages' and the contemporary period. They chart in the first case the development and codification of a language in order to enable it to express religious truths, and in the second the way an existing religious language has been adapted to express non-religious discourse. In chapter 5, Bolkvadze explains how the Georgian people were proud of their early conversion to Christianity, and of their language, equal to Greek, which was codified and elaborated at an early stage, making

it a fit language not only for the 'Great Georgian Tradition' but also as a vehicle for Eastern Christianity. In chapter 6, McCarron examines the use of religious language within Alcoholics Anonymous, specifically in 'recovery narratives'. McCarron points out that such appropriation of religious language in non-religious settings is nothing new in Europe, but has been going on since the Enlightenment. Alcoholics Anonymous, like many other organisations in the secularized West, tends to reject 'conventional Christianity in favour of an entirely subjective construct' (p.74), and happily uses Christian metaphors, images and terminology.

Several of the case studies in Part two were also particularly interesting and informative, covering between them most of the major world religions and three very different geographical and cultural contexts: chapter 12, 'The shifting role of languages in Lebanese Christian and Muslim Identities', by John Joseph (although this chapter is almost identical to chapter 8 of Joseph's *Language and Identity* (2004); chapter 14, 'The role of language in some ethnic churches in Melbourne', by Anya Woods, and chapter 15, 'Language use and religious practice. The case of Singapore', by Phyllis Ghim-Lian Chew. In all three cases, the authors analyse the way in which traditional relations between language and religion have changed, sometimes radically, in recent times, for a variety of reasons.

Two other chapters that caught my interest were 16, 'Etymythological othering' and the power of 'lexical engineering' in Judaism, Islam and Christianity. A socio-philo(sopho)logical perspective' by Ghil'ad Zuckermann, and 19, 'Maligned and misunderstood. Marginal movements and UK Law', by Annabelle Mooney. The first of these is a fascinating discussion of the way in which people of the three religions of

the Book have coined words to reflect hostility towards the other two. It focuses on 'cross-religious interactions at the micro-level of lexis. [and] gives us a valuable window onto the broader question of how language may be used as a major tool for religions and cultures to maintain or form their identity' (p.237). In chapter 19, Mooney analyses the ways in which marginal religious groups develop their own language, which can become sacred, and makes interesting comparisons between accepted religions, marginal religions and the Law.

As an introduction to the Sociology of Language and Religion, this is a valuable book, bringing together a wealth of material. The theoretical frameworks proposed by Fishman and Omoniyi are useful starting points for this emerging discipline, and the majority of the other chapters are informative and insightful. However, in a book of this type, it is inevitable that some contributions are less valuable than others; some in this volume really do not tell us anything new, and some are rather hard going. Another unfortunate aspect of this book is the poor editing in places. Several chapters are marred by the abundance of typing errors, spelling errors, odd phrasing and repetition. Nevertheless, it is a welcome first volume on the subject, and will be of interest to scholars from a range of related fields.

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