



Appreciate the distinctive characteristics of the languages you use in your publishing. by Kim Pettit

The Riches of Language

Lately I have not had very many chances to write in English," wrote Shin-Hee Yim, one of the contributors in this issue of *InterLit*. "I think I have forgotten the fragrance of English."

The fragrance of English... what a poetic phrase! I was delighted with it because it got me thinking about the nature of language, the intangible that we writers, editors, and translators love. How eloquently can we describe the object of our affections? And if we did describe language, what words would we use?

Yim spoke of the fragrance of English. We could just as easily speak of the sparkle of Swahili, the texture of Thai, the weight of Hindi, the flavor of Portuguese, the velocity of Arabic, the pigments of Dutch or the temperature of Mandarin.

In fact, some time ago, a newspaper headline caught my attention. "The Spanish Language: One of our Greatest Assets," it declared. The article, an interview with an economist in Spain, told of his love for the Spanish language, using the vocabulary common to his profession: assets, liabilities, and capital. Here was someone discussing my stock-in-trade, using terms I'd never have used. The riches of language, indeed!

Examine the sensations, history, geography, culture, and emotions that come to mind when you consider the language that fascinates you. Multiply that times two. Now ponder the work of an interpreter or translator, who must weigh phrases, parse metaphors, and dissect idioms to convey to readers, as faithfully as possible, what someone else wants said. This can be a frustrating task!

Our first biblical reference to different languages is the confusion of Babel, and at international gatherings you can often hear someone say: "My language is the one we'll speak in heaven." Perhaps we will return to that time where "the whole world had one language and a common speech" (Gen.

11:1). However, as one intoxicated with language, I rather hope that in heaven we will speak all languages perfectly, comprehending the nuances of each one's words and idioms, grasping their grammar and appreciating their quirks.

We will not need translators then. Instead, as John envisioned, we will be part of that "great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9). But, we are not in heaven yet.

"Language is the most imperfect and expensive means yet discovered for communicating thought," wrote William James, an American philosopher and educator. For those of us

in the publishing business, it is the means we prefer above all else. It is our tool of choice.

Whether we publish in one language, or many, our mission as Christian publishers is to use the tools of language to spread the good news about Christ. And this is why Cook supports publisher development efforts worldwide.

Each one of us has a "heart language," a specific tongue whose timbre stirs our souls. Its cadences bring music to our meditations; its rhythms punctuate our imaginations; and its tones ring through our dreams. Bible societies know this and talk about why it is important to publish God's Word in every language.

We at Cook want the world to ring with God's Truth. We want it proclaimed in the heart languages of every nation, every tribe, every people. Whatever the case—whether we publish translations or original works, in one tongue or ten—may the fragrance and flavor and freshness of our language bring honor to Christ. May the excellence of our editing be a testimony for Him. May our words, as clearly and graciously as possible, point to the best Word of all. v

Language is the intangible that we writers, editors, and translators love.
