

**HAGÈGE, Claude (1990): *The Dialogic Species: A Linguistic Contribution to the Social Sciences*, New York, Columbia University Press, XIV + 288 p.**

Kathleen Connors

Volume 36, Number 2-3, juin 1991

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/002361ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/002361ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal

ISSN

0026-0452 (print)

1492-1421 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Connors, K. (1991). Review of [HAGÈGE, Claude (1990): *The Dialogic Species: A Linguistic Contribution to the Social Sciences*, New York, Columbia University Press, XIV + 288 p.] *Meta*, 36(2-3), 526–527. <https://doi.org/10.7202/002361ar>

- HAGÈGE, Claude (1990): *The dialogic species: a linguistic contribution to the social sciences*, New York, Columbia University Press, XIV + 288 p.

This is a translation, by Sharon L. Shelly, of *L'homme de paroles: contribution linguistique aux sciences humaines* (Fayard, 1985). The book is part of a series entitled

“European Perspectives”, featuring general works in the social sciences and humanities by scholars prominent in Europe. It is a collection of twelve essays, in which Hagege synthesizes his orientations within linguistics. There are three parts: “On certain advances in linguistics or the human profile”, “Applications or universe, discourse, and society”, and “Theoretical goals of our dialogic nature”. The essays in Part one, “Unity of species, plurality of languages”, “The creole laboratory”, “Language universals and typological differences”, and “Writing and speaking” constitute a report on the state of the art, in the areas of linguistics of greatest interest to the author. Those in Part two, “The territory of the sign”, “Language, reality and logic”, “Word order and world order”, and “Word-masters”, argue for the centrality of perennial linguistic questions to the larger debate about the nature of man. Finally, the articles in Part three, “The three viewpoints theory”, “Socio-operative linguistics: toward a theory of communication”, “Speech fluctuation”, and “Love of language” set out the author’s contributions to the theory of the place of language in human society and culture.

The most striking feature of this work, from a North American perspective, is the impressive quality and quantity of the encyclopedic (and not only linguistic) knowledge displayed by the author, in intricate syntheses whose originality is guaranteed by the diversity of their sources. Hagege manifestly has detailed scholarly acquaintance with, among other things, a great variety of languages — hence (or perhaps because of!) his interest in typological questions. Thus, for example, he is able to discuss details of such structurally diverse languages as Finnish, Estonian and Hungarian, on the one hand, and Arabic and Hebrew, on the other, as well as many less described languages, such as Tigrinya of Ethiopia, Tzeltal of Guatemala, Ainou of Japan, and the Athapaskan languages of the northwestern U.S.

The ease with which the author integrates this detailed technical knowledge of diverse linguistic structures into the discussion of the role of language studies in the social-scientific enterprise renders the explicit and recurring theme of the book all the more puzzling: Hagege appears to believe that linguists are discrediting their discipline by an obsession with formalism. From his perspective, the other major social sciences have been making great progress and leaving linguistics behind in the land of narrowly technical, incomprehensible, and thus inconsequential intellectual games. This view is all the more surprising in that specialists in formal linguistics are almost everywhere in the minority, certainly among European linguists, and even in North American linguistics departments and programmes. Most of all, it seems strange that such a prodigious scholar, capable of dazzling his reader with his knowledge, understanding, masterful integration and of linguistic and cultural detail from earlier times and distant places, cannot come to terms with the role of formal syntax and phonology in the recent epistemological development of our discipline.

Having said this, I nevertheless recommend that if the reader, like this writer, cannot get his hands on the original book, he should at least read this translation of it, to remind himself of the great diversity of human intellectual enterprises which rightly fall under the heading of linguistics.

KATHLEEN CONNORS