

SOONER SPOTLIGHT ● KENNETH PIKE

Language leads to intercommunication, which leads to understanding, which leads to peace, says soft-spoken linguist Dr. Kenneth Pike, who has devoted nearly 50 years of his life to deciphering the thousands of tongues of the world.

For that work, Pike and the Summer Institute of Linguistics have been nominated for this year's Nobel Peace Prize. News of the nomination gave Pike celebrity status in Norman and on the University of Oklahoma campus, where the institute has conducted its summer sessions since 1942.

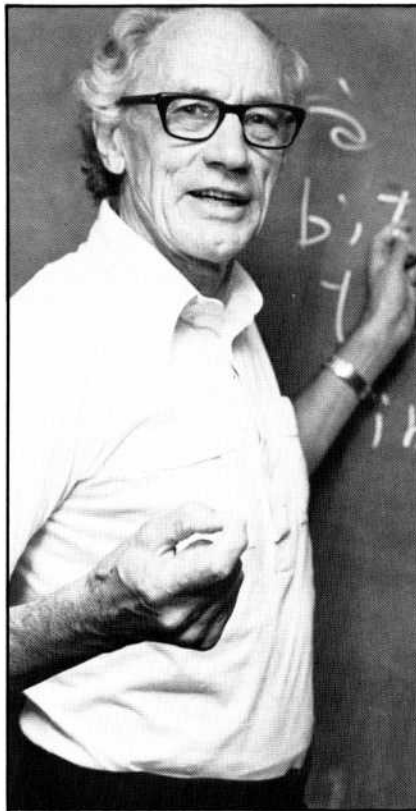
"It is significant that the institute and I have been nominated for the peace prize. Personally, I couldn't have accomplished anything by myself," the 70-year-old linguist insists with typical modesty. "I don't have a lot to contribute to peace, but the institute does."

Founded in 1934, the institute and its sister organization, the Wycliffe Bible Translators, are devoted to bringing literacy — and the Bible — to the people of the world. Pike says that their efforts to analyze and describe all of the world's approximately 5,000 languages — 3,000 of which never have been written — contribute to societal and personal peace.

"A prerequisite to peace is that people — families, tribes and nations — be able to talk together," he explains. "If we can get people to talk together, the institute can contribute to peace. We might not be able to prevent civil wars, but at least if people talk, the fighting and difficulties will be less."

However, Pike adds, "It's hard to have peace between families if they hate each other's guts. They must learn to forgive each other and start over without hatred." This is where "Bible translation fits into the international peace picture," he believes. By getting the chance to "read and live the Bible," people can find personal peace, which leads to societal peace.

Growing population pressures have increased the need for the institute's work in both linguistics and Bible translation, Pike says. "Small ethnic groups no longer are isolated in jun-



Linguist Kenneth Pike

gles. They must learn to read and write and develop relationships with their national governments."

Encroaching civilization also has shaken the faith of these groups, Pike continues, explaining that growing populations have depleted the food supply for which the natives traditionally prayed. "They're in trouble; their older beliefs won't do."

Institute members currently are working in about 750 previously unwritten languages. Living with tribes and other groups scattered all over the world, SIL translators learn the native tongue, develop an alphabet and analyze the grammar to understand the meaning of the language. They then devise primers, self-help brochures and a dictionary and work on translating the Bible into the native language. A New Testament translation takes from 10 to 15 years.

A non-denominational — but basically "evangelical Protestant" — organization, the institute has translated the New Testament into about 180 languages. "The version of the Bible used depends on the country — what is accepted locally — and on

which version is most intelligible," Pike explains.

Besides bringing literacy and the Bible to ethnic minorities, the institute has a third purpose — the scholarly study of linguistics. Pike, a noted author in descriptive linguistics and theory, takes pride in the institute's numerous professional publications which describe the sounds, words, clauses and sentences that make up various languages.

Characterized as a Christian and a scholar, Pike became interested in linguistics through his theological studies and his desire to become an evangelist. A native of Woodstock, Connecticut, Pike earned a bachelor's degree in theology in 1933 from Gordon's College in Boston. During the summer of 1935, he studied at the Wycliffe Bible Translators camp in Sulphur Springs, Arkansas, the first program in descriptive linguistics and Bible translation.

Pike spent the next two years in southern Mexico with one of the Mixtec groups, mastering their language, becoming their teacher and friend. After earning his Ph.D. in 1942, Pike remained at the University of Michigan to teach linguistics until retirement in 1979. From 1942 to 1979 he also served as president of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, bringing the summer program to the University of Oklahoma.

The OU relationship began in 1941 when an OU French professor, Della Brunsteter Owl, attended the Wycliffe linguistics camp in Arkansas, seeking help in her study of the Cherokee language. "She invited us over to teach that technology at OU," Pike recalls.

Since 1942, the Summer Institute of Linguistics has offered classes at OU every summer except two. This year's enrollment was about 300. Pike, who serves as an adjunct professor while at OU, has taught in all but three sessions. His wife, Evelyn, who also is a linguist, usually joins him on the SIL faculty.

Whether or not the Nobel Peace Prize is awarded to the institute, Pike says, the nomination should help increase "our support on a broader scale so that we can help these small ethnic groups facing inescapable pressures."