

## **Adam Głaz, *Linguistic Worldview(s): Approaches and Applications*, New York: Routledge, 2022.**

**James Underhill**

Normandy University, Rouen  
james-william.underhill@univ-rouen.fr

If an expert is someone who knows the major errors you can make in a given field, and manages to avoid most of them, then Adam Głaz, is most certainly an expert on worldviews. Working as a professor at Lublin University in Poland in the heart of the Lublin School of Ethnolinguistics, and publishing widely throughout the world, not only has Adam Głaz, organized conferences on worldviews, and edited books on worldviews, he has also translated worldviews. As an interpreter and a translator, he builds bridges between people, cultures, students and researchers. And he goes both ways, into his native Polish and into English, guiding keynote scholars such as Anna Wierzbicka and Jerzy Bartmiński into English or Polish as the occasion or the publication requires. For this reason alone, Routledge are lucky to have secured an author of such scope, rigour, integrity. Adam Głaz has the crucial clear-sightedness for this almost impossible task.

The Routledge editors clearly understand two things. The keyword, term, or concept “worldview” has become so central, pivotal and indispensable to such a wide range of authors and disciplines, that a synthesis of its generally-agreed meaning of meanings is required. But at the same time, the concept forms part of the arguments of so many schools of thought, that the meanings attributed to “worldview” are inevitably up for grabs, and hotly disputed. Indeed, the definitions used often exclude or obscure the other meanings attributed to ‘worldview’. Lucidity and critical insight in this endeavour, require a rare form of openness that is selective, evaluative, and semantically coherent. As a translator and a scholar, Adam Głaz has these qualities, and he brings them to bear in the masterful account of the wide range of disciplines that are working with a concept of worldviews and see it as the prism within which to discuss and debate how we live together today in language.

The book opens with wine. Evidently, Adam Głaz knows and loves wine. In the same way, he is a connoisseur of worldviews, and he tastes – and enables us to taste – a fine range of

approaches to worldviews. The style is agreeable and speculative, but rigorous from the outset. If Adam Głaz discusses wine, it is to bring to bear an implicit critique of worldviews as a concept. For Adam Głaz, living in language is about kinetics and taste, not simply about seeing, knowing and perspectives. So, analysing “white wine” (pp. 1-2) is not only a mode of cognitive processing and categorization, it is also a question of associations, etymology, and conception. Perceiving white wine, therefore, becomes a gustative experience and a cultural activity in which the Anglo subject lives within a tradition that affiliates wine and wheat. In French, *vin blanc* takes us into another tradition, another experience perhaps, and certainly another mode of reconceptualising the “pale yellow-green” alcoholic liquid as ‘white’ (p. 2).

Specialists of translation studies, semantics, and cognitive linguists, lexicographers, linguistic anthropologists, and ethnolinguists will all find a wide range of schools given their place in this well-balanced account of what “worldviews” mean for us. Students and researchers alike will enjoy both the elegant style, the clarity of the programme itself, which invites us on an adventure, a tour of a terrain on which we encounter philosophers, linguists, linguistic anthropologists and translators. The book is surprisingly free from digressions, and each author or thinker is given their opportunity to give voice to their worldview; but each one has to pay their way. In a book of this size and scope, there is no space for irrelevance or minor bit actors. And the vast majority of the authors have something of note to say about the way we speak of language and culture, and the way we construct our worldviews. There is a political dimension to this book, and worldviews can be conceived as *Weltanschauungen*. But Adam Głaz does not allow himself to get imprisoned by political or ideological frameworks and logics. As he puts it (p. 2):

Linguistic worldviews function on the communal, collective level but also on the personal, idiolectal level. If on the communal level, *home* and *father* are “good” words, they need not be such for all speakers.

Given that Adam Głaz invites us to explore German, French, Polish, English, American and Australian authors, this position reassures us that we are not simply going to seek the same words or ideas in each language or reduce words to labels. Neither are we going to reduce speakers or writers to representatives of their culture in an etic approach to language and culture. Indeed, as the index indicates (p. 218), essentialisms and essentialization are something that the author avoids and encourages us to avoid when we investigate and explore other cultures and languages. People and communities are complex, and so are worldviews.

The book is divided up into five chapters. The first considers the concept up close and how it relates to culture, translation, and what the term tends to exclude. The Second Chapter takes us from the German legacy of Hamann, Herder and Wilhelm von Humboldt to contemporary Slavic Ethnolinguistics, but gives a very balanced account of some of the key figures who make the “American Contribution”, and other versions of Western Ethnosemantics. The chapter ends in speculation, asking a crucial question, that will remain – and must remain – for Adam Głaz, a question: Where do we stand now?

In Chapter Three, the author’s overview of today’s worldview research takes a closer look at Humboldt, Underhill, Wierzbicka, Cultural linguistics and Cognitive Ethnolinguistics, and stresses new openings in Russian research. But once again, the tour is in no way arbitrary. If we take the scenic route, it is to arrive at Adam Głaz’s destination: the ‘Common Questions’ (p. 127).

Having set up his synthesis, after carefully guiding us through our travels through cultures, languages, and worldviews, Adam Głaz invites us, in Chapter Four, to consider a series of thought experiments in which he investigates Greta Thunberg’s rhetoric with its central “house metaphor” (pp. 144-145). Other concise case studies include, “hope” for Pope Francis, and “heart” for the Polish translators of their compatriot, Conrad, with his *Heart of Darkness*. And with an ethical earnestness and an eye for contemporary crises, Adam Głaz does not avert his gaze from recent traumas, border crises and wars and the tribulations of immigrants. Chapter Four ends once more with an open-ended question; one that may perplex us, but which we no doubt have to face up to. If worldview studies claim to be about being open to other cultures and other peoples, Adam Głaz asks us at the end of the case studies (p. 179), what have these analyses shown us?

The closing chapter ends differently. It begins and ends with the crucial question that forms the *raison d’être* of this synthesis of worldview scholarship: Where do we go? Clearly, for Adam Głaz, this tour of worldviews should transform our perspectives, just as translating and language-learning transforms our perspectives. This question is conceptual, grammatical, semantic, political, ethical, and deeply personal. Creating worldviews, for Adam Głaz, appears to be about inspiration, openness, discernment, conceptual and cognitive re-categorization: it is about our “rapport” with the world, with language, and with culture. It’s about people. It is a deeply personal experience, and since the author challenges the visual metaphor, seeing-is-knowing, he opens up scope for further debate into feeling, sensibility and the ways the senses are solicited in our conception and categorization of the world. This leads Adam Głaz to a

beautiful paradox, that, as with all paradoxes, is a contradiction that might be true: linguistic worldview becomes a “Real Virtuality”.

Readers will decide how fair Adam Głaz is to each approach; what has been highlighted and what has (inevitably) been left out. The choice of languages and cultures themselves (predominantly Western and European) will inevitably leave Adam Głaz open to criticism from various continents, and from post-colonial studies (in which worldview has become a key concept). Given the scope of the study, and the size of the book, the coverage of problematic or deeply perplexing thinkers like Herder will be restricted to short quotations without much interpretation or contextualization. This is a *modus operandi* which the genre requires. True, Whorf, and the father-figure of American Linguistic Anthropology, Boas, both deserve two or three pages, and the same can be said about Hamann, and more recently, Heidegger. But what other option is open?

Adam Głaz has his preferences and his priorities; he selects the authors that give shape and form to his own conception of worldviews as a philosophical, linguistic, cultural and translation studies paradigm. This means he spends more time on Edward Sapir (see pp. 14-15 and pp. 78-83), Gary Palmer (see primarily pp. 35-37 and pp. 127-128), Underhill (pp. 155-159). This inevitably leaves a lot of people out and reduces the key thinkers to their essential concepts and paradigms, their main objectives. It inevitably leaves little space to discuss their methodology.

But since each of Adam Głaz’s chapters could easily form the basis of a book or a series of books, the choice to opt for a concise and coherent overview, a working synthesis, that can open up a space for further critique and reflection, will suit most readers. And it will inevitably do a much greater service to the key players in Adam Głaz’s story of worldviews by finding a place for them in the plot. A 900-page text is not an option, given the reading habits of even the most patient specialists today. And Adam Głaz’s strategy is pragmatic and efficient. His aim is to frame worldviews in a coherent, meaningful, and thought-provoking narrative. Rather than the final word, or imperious judgement on various vast fields of scholarship, this is an invitation to explore the world anew from the perspective of a great range of writers and thinkers.

So what does this story-teller have to tell us?

The author moves gracefully from Wierzbicka’s affirmation that “(i)t is a commonplace to say that every language embodies in its very structure a certain world-view” (p. 14), to Sapir’s belief in the “relativity of the form of thought” (p. 15). He integrates Gumperz and Levinson (1991), who claim that the incommensurable nature of “the semantic structures of different languages” leaves them to conclude that since language, thought, and culture “are deeply interlocked”, we can speak of each as having a distinctive world-view (p. 15). Duranti steps in

– in Adam Głaz’s account – to remind us that there is a “mutual feedback” between language and perception, since language encourages us “to pay attention to different aspects of reality” (pp. 15-16). John Leavitt, who has worked closely with Adam Głaz in the past, steps in to remind us that defining the world is not only about “the mind’s eye” but also the mind’s “ear and nose” (pp. 17). If Adam Głaz quotes Boroditsky (p. 18), it is to remind us that measuring a person’s worldview and ascribing worldviews to entire peoples is problematic from the outset and hardly gets any easier, whatever methodology is applied. This is what it means to tell a story. Rather than comparing and contrasting, critiquing and rejecting, Adam Głaz seeks to build a concept, a working model that can be discussed, critiqued, and modified. In this sense, this is a very scientific project.

Adam Głaz is not able to do justice to Gary Palmer’s research into scenarios, cultural value-laden scripts and mythology. This would take us into a very different book. But he highlights that language is not simply about words, concepts, terms and definitions; cultures evolve over time in traditions that are re-enacted in rituals and reappraised or rejected (see p. 37). Quoting Bert Peeters, a late member of the Canberra NSM team, Adam Głaz reminds us that investigating worldviews means investigating syntactic patterns and communicative behaviours; what Peeters calls “ethnolinguistic pathways” (p. 37).

Literature is not neglected, and neither is translating, in the approach Adam Głaz is setting up. Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, invents a Russian ‘Napoleon’, an enemy to the people, viewed from the perspective of the invaded Russian people. Translating that Napoleon into any other language (but most obviously into French) becomes an act of political and cultural significance. For this reason, Adam Głaz agrees with John Leavitt that it is fair to conclude that translating has become “the frontline practice in the exploration of the linguistic multiverse” (p. 44).

To the thinker that coined *Weltansicht* (but not *Weltanschauung*), the founder of the University of Berlin, Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), Adam Głaz devotes three pages. However, the choice to follow up on this with an examination of Humboldt’s philosophy of language, followed by a third section on the Neo-Humboldtians, clearly demonstrates that Humboldt remains a key influence in forming an overall complex and supple concept that proves useful as a working hypothesis for shaping projects and methodologies designed to unveil what goes on in languages and cultures. This is borne out in the concluding section of Chapter Two, in which Adam Głaz overwhelms readers with a wave of questions: What is the place of universals? How do multilinguals force us to reappraise the idea of entering into more than one linguistic worldview? Does language make us a community? And what kind of diversity exists within the community? These are indeed tough questions, and Adam Głaz does not pull his

punches or offer us an easy option. He suggests we get to work finding our way along the paths that the worldview project opens up for us.

Chapter Three makes ample use of figures and diagrams. This inevitably goes against the grain of Adam Głaz's insistence that worldviews are about more than views. Like most of us, however, Adam Głaz is primarily visual, and his visual resources are one of the strengths of this book. He juxtaposes, compares and contrasts the various models and figures that have been invented to distinguish between worldviews. Do we set them up as opposites? Do they overlap? Are there worldviews within worldviews? And how do we invent a terminology that enables us to escape confusion and impressive but misleading paradoxes? Adam Głaz does not hesitate to critique the models he surveys. But he concludes by saying that there is a common consensus that each of the individual models is merely an attempt to fleetingly grasp the dynamism of language and linguistic communities that are constantly evolving and transforming themselves (p. 129).

By the time readers reach Chapter Four, they will be heartened to find the wide range of case studies open up questions for reflection. There is also something refreshingly intimate, exact, but insightful in these studies. It is in these passages that the core of existence is reappraised as the heart or the centre of nothingness, in the perplexing study of how translators have recreated Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (pp. 159-161). The author sets this up as a thought-experiment to enable him to question to what extent ethnolinguistics and translation studies can generate evidence to support the idea that the "heart" is not necessarily the "heart" when we extract it from the body of one tradition and transplant it into another. What reluctance do translators feel? How is the body constructed and represented? How do figurative usages give a body to frameworks of references? From the perspective of Cognitive Scholars working in the US in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s (see principally Lakoff & Johnson and Turner & Fauconnier), the body is the physical, experiential starting point that allows metaphoric flights of imagination and metaphoric extensions. This is a dubious foundation to base arguments and analyses on. From the perspective of Adam Głaz and worldview thinkers, the body is already deeply framed within culture and language. What it does, and what is done with it, is symbolic, cultural and linguistic.

In different ways, the case studies help clarify this question. Pope Francis, on the one hand, with a worldview of hope, the human heart, homes, houses and communities, sheds light on the way discourses that strive to be universal (as all the world religions must strive) "hold together" as discourse strategies. But there is nothing over-optimistic and naïve about Adam Głaz's choice of case studies, and he begins with Greta Thunberg's Environmental Children's Organization,

and the way she harnesses the house metaphor to set up oppositions between the Rich vs. Poor, the Powerless vs Powerful, and ultimately, the “people” who understand and act, and the powerful who resist action.

What doesn't find its way into Adam Głaz's wide survey? Very little it would seem. France exists with more than 26 references (and many passages of more than one page) according to the index (p. 90). Above all, Europe exists (with a similar number of references). But as we have seen, Australia, North America, the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia, and of course Adam Głaz's Poland, exist in the discussion of contemporary worldviews. And so does Taiwan and China. Worldviews are everywhere and so, it would seem logical, we all need a working concept of worldviews; one we can work with together. This is the ultimate objective of this project.

Worldviews, Adam Głaz, argues are about who we are; and how we define ourselves together. The author is not offering us an easy option or an idiot's guide to worldviews. He does not underestimate the ways other worldviews or other cultures challenge us. But he invites us to rise to the challenge. The heart and the mind, the eye, the ear and the nose, all allow us to perceive the world, but also to perceive the way we are and the way we feel (p. 206). Going beyond our limits means taking risks, and as Adam Głaz puts it, “(t)he horizons of our languages act as virtual but real limits” (p. 206). Somewhat surprisingly, Adam Głaz leaves us with Gadamer, who reminds us that we do not leave or negate our homelands and our worlds, but when we return from our travels into worldviews, we return like travellers returning home with new experiences.

We return richer. This is the cultural perspective. We return better equipped, better armed, for political confrontations, just as Taiwan and China must negotiate what sharing a language and a culture means, and what resistance to political regimes means. As the frontiers of Europe are being redefined (once more), these questions will not simply go away.

Do worldview theories help? Adam Głaz is remarkably restrained in his answer to this, arguing it is too much to consider that “language introduces order to an otherwise chaotic reality” (pp. 192). Worldview approaches do, however, he contends, enable us to distinguish between existence and non-existence, mobility and stasis, big and small, savoury and unpalatable (p. 193). Is this useful? In the sense that language serves to enable us to live and live together, it would appear to be very useful for most of us.

There is a more obvious way in which this is a ‘useful’ book, however. Adam Głaz is clearly concerned with readers, students, teachers and translators, who are trying to make sense of the world. From the personal level to the resistance of subcultures, worldview theories have been felt to be crucial for existence. Indeed, the author reminds us that the Polish schools of

worldview rose up to counter the “alternative reality” that communist propaganda was promoting. In this sense, Polish worldview theories inherently aspire to (the desire for) freedom. Worldviews enable individuals to invent alternative models of communities, when they can no longer identify with the masses or the party and their idea or ideal of “the people”.

What criticisms does this book leave itself open to? Several. It is too short, too European, too focused on concepts and keywords. It tends to neglect overarching narratives, symbolic and metaphoric patterning. The book leaves little scope for investigating the way worldviews resist worldviews within worldviews. The examples of translation are very well chosen, but do not enable us to fully comprehend what is ultimately at stake in the question of universals. And are our universals concepts or narratives? Values or roles? The place of Natural Semantics Metalanguage, and Cassin’s “untranslatables” deserve further investigation. The ethnopoetics of translation perplexes us, and begs for further consideration.

But that would mean cutting out some crucial chains in this coherent narrative. And in a book of this size, we have a remarkably efficient overview. The author provides us with an outstanding chapter by chapter multilingual bibliography, and a 13-page index to enable us to find our way among terms such as ‘ethnphraseology’, ‘ethnopoetics’, ‘ethnopragmatics’ and ‘ethnosemantics’ (p. 218).

True, more examples and more detail would always be welcome. A two-page selected bibliography, giving what the expert considers to be the key writers, and the key schools would be a plus. In the closing chapter, most readers will probably feel they want a bit more (according to their tastes, their languages and their fields of study). But when we are impressed with what we have and want more, isn’t it a good sign? Adam Głaz is certainly limiting and defining the concept. He is setting up the table for negotiation, clearing the field for battles. Battles, wars and negotiations depend on what is at stake, and Adam Głaz has staked out his understanding of this complex concept with multiple meanings and usages. Adam Głaz, himself, is not a warrior, but rather a patient scholar, a translator, a teacher, and what Humboldt would have called a *Sprachdenker*, a thinker-in-language. He invites us to think what languages mean for us and how we make meaning out of the world around us together.

## References

Cassin, Barbara (ed., co-edited with Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra and Michael Wood for the English edition) (2014) *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.



- Fauconnier, Gilles, Mark Turner (2003) *Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities*. New York: Basic Books.
- Głaz, Adam (ed.) (2019) *Languages, Cultures, Worldviews: Focus on Translation*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave, Macmillan.
- Głaz, Adam, David S. Danaher, Przemysław Łozowski (eds.) (2013) *The Linguistic Worldview: Ethnolinguistics, Cognition, and Culture*. London: Versita.
- Gumperz, John, Stephen C. Levinson (1991) "Rethinking Linguistic Relativity". *Current Anthropology* 32 (5); 613–623.
- Lakoff, George, Mark Johnson (1999) *Philosophy in the Flesh*. New York: Basic Books.