

BOOK REVIEWS

Learning a Foreign Language, A Handbook Prepared Especially for Missionaries, by Eugene A. Nida. New York, Friendship Press, 1957 (Revised Edition); pp. 212; \$ 1.75.

Learning a foreign language is for some a delight and for others an unpleasant drudgery; for some it is merely a part of their general education, for others an essential part of their work. To the latter category belong missionaries, and in particular Bible translators: intimate knowledge of one or more, often highly exotic or little known languages is a necessary condition for the fulfilling of their commission. And whether they belong to the first or the second category mentioned above as regards learning the language, it can certainly be of great importance for them to study this practical handbook by Nida before and during their language study. The uninitiated can learn from this book, which has been available now for several years—perhaps to their astonishment—that they must first rid themselves of all kinds of widely spread but nonetheless erroneous ideas about languages and the learning of them, and replace them by sounder ones. The reader will learn that success in language-learning depends more on giving sufficient time and attention, and on the use of the right methods, than on innate ability; that in order to learn to speak a language well, you must begin by speaking it badly, for the best method of learning to speak a language is not from grammars and dictionaries, but is “language learning by language using” and “learning by listening”—just as a child does—in the process of which making mistakes is an essential part. For “speaking a language and playing the piano are skills and like any skill they require practice, with the full knowledge that one is going to make mistakes” (p. 22). Nearly half the book is devoted to correcting misconceptions and giving practical advice on methods of learning, drills and the use of a teacher or informant.

In learning languages adults have the advantage over a child of being able to do conscious and systematic language-analysis (as Prof. Siertsema emphasizes in her interesting article “Language Learning and Language Analysis”, *Lingua*, X 2). However, in order to be able to profit fully from this, one should be aware of modern methods in this area. Therefore the second part of Nida’s book rightly contains an elementary introduction in four chapters on “Mastering the sounds” (phonetics), “Figuring out the forms” (morphology), “Putting words together” (syntax) and “Discovering the meanings” (semantics). Avoiding technical terms, the author here treats the chief methods of language analysis in as far as they are of practical importance, and by means of countless examples an impression is given of the great variety of possibilities which one can meet in different languages and

which one must bear in mind when learning an unknown language. Because of the elementary character of the book one cannot expect an exhaustive treatment, so that not all questions are answered. For example, one misses the warning that one can discover affixes which are identical in form but must be distinguished because they have a different function in different word classes. But even the professional linguist will be able to learn certain things from this short introduction, and an extensive bibliography is given for anyone who wishes to delve deeper into the subjects dealt with. Thus the book shows how language-learning may become a fascinating business, even for those who are apt to abhor it.

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Manual of Articulatory Phonetics, by William A. Smalley, New York, Practical Anthropology; Pt. 1, 217 pp., 1961, \$ 2.00; Pt. 2, 272 pp., 1962, \$ 2.00; Workbook supplement, 186 pp., 1962.

A fundamental part of language-learning, and one in which "learning by listening" and "mimicry" are of prime importance, is that of learning the "pronunciation", or to use the technical term, the study of phonetics. Anyone who wishes to be able to use a foreign language well must learn to distinguish the various foreign sounds, and to imitate them correctly. Without this, the most fluent and grammatically correct use of the language remains incomprehensible, or at least sounds strange. Long and constant practice with both mouth and ear are required in order to achieve easy and accurate pronunciation. It is therefore useful for people who may encounter very diverse types of language to learn in advance of the wide range of sound-types which they may possibly meet with, and gain practice in distinguishing between them and imitating them.

Smalley's book is an interesting attempt to meet the need for a simple, systematic textbook which may be used for such training in practical phonetics. It has developed from several years experience in teaching phonetics, and has therefore been tested in practical use.

Together there are some 33 lessons, in each of which certain sound-types are described, each according to its articulatory characteristics, with clear diagrams and examples for illustration, and with practical advice and extensive drills for exercising the pronunciation. In a systematic manner progress is made from elementary to more complex sounds, so that a wide area of general phonetics is covered.

Part 1 contains seven lessons on consonants (e.g. on voicing, aspiration, affricates and nasals), and alternating with these four on intonation and pitch, and three on vowels. Part 2 contains nine more lessons on consonants and nine on vowels, including treatments of such exotic sounds as clicks, implosives and glottalized consonants.