

Book Review

A Basic Course in Colloquial Newari. 1984. Tej R. Kansakar. 150 pages. Kathmandu: Campus of International Languages, Tribhuvan University.

Though the cover gives the date of publication as 1984, and the title page gives it as 1983, this long-awaited volume became available in what the author views as a preliminary edition only in 1987. In spite of what the manuscript suffered through the vagaries of the errant mimeograph machine, this preliminary edition turns out to have been well worth waiting for.

In putting together a language learning course one wishes on the one hand to treat the various language skills (pronunciation, word formation, sentence construction, style and usage, and the like) in some orderly fashion and on the other hand one wishes to grade the materials in such a way that the student has opportunity to acquire acceptable habits of expression and adequate levels of comprehension through a massive exposure to material that is consistently easy for the learner, given his current level of competence. One needs, in effect, both a reference grammar and an extensive graded corpus, each keyed to the other.

K.P. Malla (1985) provides a reference grammar which summarizes in an admirably well-organized manner the descriptive work done on Newari up to about 1983, the date of the most recent entries in his bibliography. Kansakar's work supplements this quite effectively by putting pedagogical legs on his own original research in phonology (a milestone Ph.D. dissertation on Newari phonology to which he seems to have omitted all reference) and by making other recent work in morphology and syntax palatable within the framework of a language learning course.

By devoting the first third of the book to phonology, Kansakar exposes the student to a considerable body of material. If the student were expected to assimilate all the vocabulary he were being exposed to at this stage it would certainly be very difficult, especially for those from the West who are not adept at rote learning. The purpose, of course, is not vocabulary enrichment, but is that of enabling the student to build a good emic sense of discrimination within the Newari sound system and good phonetic habits of production, acceptable to native speakers. Viewed this way the material is consistently easy and thus well graded. The student is not expected at this stage to be able to use the lexical items in correctly constructed phrases and sentences, but having encountered these lexical items first

as phonological examples, they will inevitably be more familiar when he or she encounters them again as lexical items to be learned for use in conversation. Kansakar has thus achieved a fair measure of grading without compromising the clarity of his outline.

The influence of Hari (1971) and of Shresthacharya, Maskey, and Hale (1971) upon the conversationally-oriented grammatical units of the remaining two-thirds of the book is unmistakable, though here again Kansakar maintains a clearer outline than either of the earlier works and in general has given fuller treatment of the topics that are covered.

The work concludes with two appendices, one dealing with sentence types, adapted from Hashimoto (1977) and the other with idioms drawn from Joshi (N.S. 1078).

Unlike some language learning courses that reflect only the fond hopes of the authors, this one has benefitted from use in conjunction with actual course work. Though the author views this as a preliminary edition [and its present mimeographed state does scant justice to its contents], it is to be highly commended to academically oriented would-be speakers of Newari as an excellent starting point in learning colloquial Kathmandu Newari.

REFERENCES

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- Austin Hale