

*Teach Yourself Nepali* by Michael Hutt and Abhi Subedi. London: Teach Yourself Books, Hodder and Stoughton Educational, 1999. 308pp. Appendices: cardinal numbers; kinship terms; key to exercises; Nepali-English glossary (1325 words); English-Nepali glossary (398 words).

Reviewed by Marie-Christine Cabaud

Michael Hutt is Reader in Nepali and Himalayan Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, and a specialist on Nepali language and literature. One of his recent publications (1997) is a reader for those who already know some Nepali, which provides extracts in both prose and verse, with numerous grammatical notes and a sizeable word index. Abhi Subedi is a professor of English, a historian of Nepali literature, and a writer. Among his many articles and works in Nepali and English, one should mention in particular his history of Nepali literature, which remains a fundamental reference book despite being twenty years old.

As to content, the two authors combine their respective expertise and aim to guide the beginner through the language of everyday verbal exchanges. They adopt the classic method: 34 short texts (only two of which are not dialogues) progressively introduce grammatical difficulties. The texts cover many aspects of life in Kathmandu, as well as providing a little on villages (identity, times of day, means of transport, shopping, numbers, the calendar, the doctor, airport, marriage, religion...). At the same time, most useful grammatical forms are also covered, from inflexions of the verb to subordinate clauses. At the beginning of each text the context is explained in English; then one finds the new vocabulary in a box, followed by the translation of the dialogue, and grammatical explanations. This is in turn followed by exercises. The authors deliberately avoid linguistic jargon (explanations "are intended to be as clear and jargon-free as possible"). A few illustrations provide a little Nepalese atmosphere. There is an accompanying cassette tape of the dialogues.

The book is well in keeping with the Teach Yourself series. It permits solitary study, without the help of a teacher. No new difficulty is introduced

without the key to resolve it. The book uses a middle level of the language, with occasional incursions of more elaborate or more elementary forms, all the while respecting social hierarchies. The result is a very contemporary Nepali which at the same time satisfies academic standards. It also provides, by means of the very dense dialogues, a great variety of tools. A regular and methodical learner has a good year of work, perhaps more, within two covers. At the end of it, he or she should be comfortable experiencing total immersion.

None the less, it is perhaps regrettable that the roman transcription appears in the body of the lesson, but not in either of the two vocabulary lists. This may have been from a commendable wish not to rush students or to force them to learn a good system of Latin transcription, which is always useful to know.

The tables and grammar explanations could be a little more comprehensive. For example, the 3rd person forms of *ho* appear in a separate table six pages after the 1st and 2nd persons. Why not group them all in a single table, even if the 3rd person is not used at once? For *cha*, why not group the personal pronouns, the affirmative and the negative forms together, so that all three forms can be seen on the same line? Why show the contingent future and the complete future in two different tables, so that one has to turn the page to go from one to the other?

One may also regret the profusion of translation exercises, which have forced out more entertaining kinds of exercise (rearranging sentences that are mixed up, filling in the blanks...). Of course these mild criticisms do not refer in any way to the quality of the Nepali used in this book. They simply express concerns about the balance and progressivity of explanations, and about ease of acquisition.

To conclude, this book represents an innovation among texts on Nepali in English. The existing books of an academic sort (by Clark and Matthews) begin with the grammatical rule and move on to show its application. Karki and Shrestha's *Basic Course in Spoken Nepali* addressed itself to people already immersed in a Nepali context and privileged the practical side of learning language to the detriment of grammatical explanations. In this book, by contrast, the authors use grammar in order to assist a solid acquisition of the spoken language.