

(L. "domination, pouvoir"); missing: *faire—de* "faire le difficile, se refuser à"; missing: *estre en—* "être livré à discrétion de"); *desfendant: loc* son cor d—"despite herself" [a revealing *lapsus*: line 677 (Winters): "Estoit et sor li desfendant"; L. = "*estoit seur son cors desfendant*" (such are the dangers of derivative editions!)]].

In conclusion: despite our laundry list of quibbles, Winters offers a useful, informative edition. Let us hope that a second edition will be the "critical" text announced.

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□ *The World's Major Languages*. Edited by Bernard Comrie. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987. 1025 pp. \$79.00.

This volume contains some fifty essays by forty-four scholars on individual languages and language families, preceded by a general introduction to basic notions about language relationships and interaction.

Judging by those areas where I have some competence (Indo-European and Chinese), I find the overall quality of the contributions remarkably high, although there is inevitably some variability: the chapter on Indo-European is decidedly inferior to those which follow it; that on Polish seems less informative than those on its Slavic relatives, while that on Chinese is excellent on syntax and morphology but inadequate and downright misleading on segmental phonology.

Proofreading appears to have been excellent, and I have noted only a few errors likely to cause confusion: on page 35 the Greek and Latin rows for "pig, horse, dog" must be transposed one column to the left; on page 345, line 7, read "subject-verb-object."

Any comprehensive survey such as this faces nearly insoluble problems regarding content and format. General editor Comrie has chosen what he defines as 'major' world languages (ix). I cannot quarrel either with his criteria or with his application of them, but I find it regrettable that this procedure results in the exclusion of any Amerindian or native Australian languages. I believe even the general reader would expect to find such representation in a world survey.

The decision to allow contributors great flexibility in descriptive approach and format (x) must be counted a great success. All participants make an effort to include certain basics about language history, social situation, and overall structure. At the same time, the editor's exhortation to "tell the reader what you consider to be the most interesting facts about the language" produces an impressive and fas-

cinating variety of responses.

In a few instances, however, one could wish for a bit more editorial control. For example, the individual chapters on Romance languages and those on Slavic languages appear to share certain underlying assumptions. This consistency makes cross comparisons easy and inspires confidence in the descriptions. On the other hand, two statements on Indo-European phonology (48, 71-72) flatly contradict one another. Specialists will find this predictable, but non-specialists may justifiably be curious, and the general reader will likely be mystified (or conclude that the experts don't know what they are talking about).

The major problem with this book results from a basic confusion about its intended audience. The general introduction is an exemplary treatment of such fundamental linguistic concepts as genetic relationship, dialect versus language, and pidgin/creole. It is lucid, succinct, and non-technical. One thus assumes that the entire volume is aimed at the general educated reader who is interested in languages. However, beginning with the very first individual description, one faces the full brunt of linguistic technical jargon, generally without definitions. To make matters worse, there is no attempt at standardization: even a beginning linguistics student may be momentarily flustered by "plosives," "blocked syllables," or "polarity." How a general reader is to deal with all of this I have no idea. Furthermore, many lengthy discussions of structural details are clearly aimed at other linguists.

On the other hand, if the intended audience is indeed linguists and linguistic students, then the general introduction is superfluous, and much of the space devoted to such basics as writing systems could have been better used providing still more of the kind of structural details that linguists would find valuable.

In sum, I regret that I cannot recommend this book to the general reader (except the introduction and the chapter on English). Despite the problems cited, however, those who have had a general introduction to linguistics will find much here that is both useful and fascinating, as I certainly did.

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□ *Nihongo: In Defence of Japanese*. By Roy Andrew Miller. London: Athlone Press, 1986. 262 pp.

This is a book about the Japanese language designed for general readers interested in Japan. Miller's aim is to defend against pejorative and irresponsible comments on the language by American and Ja-