

Book Review

By WALLY OLSON

BEGINNING TLINGIT

By Nora and Richard Dauenhauer

Published by Tlingit Readers, Inc. Anchorage, Alaska. 1976
280 pages. Price \$12.80 + \$1.20 for postage and handling.

Beginning Tlingit is a basic textbook of the Tlingit language produced jointly by the Alaska Native Education Board, Alaska Native Language Center and Tlingit Readers, Inc. The authors of the book have attempted to do several things (1) write a set of instructions for teaching Tlingit as a second language for those who do not speak Tlingit already (2) give some suggestions and directions for those who speak Tlingit and want to teach the language (3) explain some of the grammar of the language to provide an insight into understanding how it works. Preparing such a book was a big order. Tlingit is a complicated language, as is English. Imagine what it would be like if you were to teach someone from Mars how to speak American English? Then try to put it all down into one book! Nora and Richard Dauenhauer are probably as well qualified as anyone to write such a book. Nora speaks the language fluently, Richard has been trained as a linguist. Of course they had sense enough to work with other skilled people like Constance Naish, Gillian Story, Jeff Leer and Michael Drauss.

No matter how good a text book is, it cannot teach the language by itself; the first bit of advice this reviewer would have is to find yourself a good speaker of Tlingit. In fact, it would be helpful if there were a series of cassette tape recordings to accompany the book so that students could practice at home. A writing system only reflects the spoken language, and it will take anyone many hours of practice to learn even the basics of Tlingit.

The authors point out that the Tlingit language will never come back into use as it was in the past, but that is no excuse for not studying the language. For those who are Tlingits by birth, it may increase their pride in their cultural heritage. For those of us who are limited to one language, like English, a study of Tlingit can expand our minds. A new language can show us new ways of looking at the world, new ideas on living with other people in other cultures, and even make us think a little differently. This is the first, and as far as this reviewer knows, the only real textbook on the Tlingit language. By supplementing it with Naish and Story's Tlingit Verb Dictionary, and with the proposed Noun Dictionary they hope to produce very soon, there will be enough material available for real college classes in the Tlingit language. Although the book is broken down into only nine lessons, there is enough in it to keep the average student busy for a whole year.

Its evident that the book is a labor of love. Even though the price is \$12.80, they won't be making much money for all the time and effort they have invested. On behalf of all of us who have been looking for such a book for a long time, and finally got one much better than we had hoped to find, all we can say is "Thank you" — Gunalcheesh!