

## Book Reviews

**One Language for the World and How To Achieve It.** Mario Pei. Devin-Adair, New York, 1958. xvi + 291 pp. \$5.

Albert Guérard's *A Short History of the International Language Movement* was published in 1922. It was the work of a master of English prose, a past master in the art of presenting a chaotic subject in smoothly surveyable form. It has long since gone out of print. The fast-moving events in the field of interlinguistics have long since made it go out of date as well. To state that Mario Pei's newest book satisfies completely the very urgent need for a new and up-to-date Guérard is high praise indeed. It is fully merited. Unfortunately, Pei's book tries to do even more.

Part I of *One Language for the World* presents a survey of the world's linguistic maze and the resulting problems of international communication. This makes fascinating reading. Here Pei is concerned with a theme which only a linguist who is simultaneously a sociologist can handle in a meaningful fashion. Pei's encyclopedic fund of information enables him to handle his job superbly.

Part II is an account of past and present developments and proposals concerned with the problem of Babel. How the polyglot impasse solved itself for the nonce as a matter of historical fact in numerous specific situations and how individuals and groups have worked to solve it by planned intervention are described vividly, urbanely, and fairly. As for the planned or guided solutions, one has the impression that Pei takes seriously only the approaches represented by Esperanto and Interlingua. This is entirely as it should be. Esperanto emerges as a dream which the faithful believe will come true. Interlingua appears as a tool effective today in the specialized applications for which it was designed. Yet, it must not be thought that Pei as a historian and as a reporter fails to do full justice to the multifarious complexities—the amateurish naïveté, the sound philological research, the antics of the lunatic fringe, the philosophical probing,

the chiliastic idealism—which make up the scientific, prescientific, and pseudoscientific phases of interlinguistics.

The colorful appeal of Pei's subject matter and his grand skill in giving it its dramatic due cannot conceal the fact that the linguist Pei refuses steadfastly to come to grips with the anthropological associations of his science. He speaks of language and society and has nothing to say about language and culture. Surely we have no right to expect that every student of language should be a dyed-in-the-wool general semanticist or metalinguist, but we do have a right to expect him to heed the problems whose insistent reality has been clear ever since Korzybski and Whorf first pointed them out. It is perhaps symptomatic that in his entire volume Pei finds no occasion at all to mention Korzybski, and about Whorf there is only the misleading (or downright erroneous) remark that he—along with Duns Scotus and Scaliger—dreamed about a universal grammar.

Pei's refusal to take seriously the suggestion that diverse linguistic patterns are specific to diverse patterns of thought and that both are related in a unique and functional manner to specific cultural courses of development serves him in good stead in the third and final part of his book. Here he presents his own ideas on how to achieve one language for the world.

It's all very much simpler than most of us thought. The universal language will be selected by a congress of authorized representatives of the world's governments. What language will be chosen does not matter as long as all agree to adopt it. It may be oriental or occidental, obscure or illustrious, planned or natural, Chinese or English or Finnish or Ojibway or Volapük or Interlingua. It will take the delegates little more than a week to select it. It will take a committee of linguists a year to retouch it and the governments of the world five years to train the necessary teachers. Immediately thereafter it will begin to be taught in all the world's kindergartens on a par with the children's native speech. The beneficiaries of this type of training will reach adulthood as full-

blown bilingualists. And "long before the middle of the twenty-first century, the person unable to speak, understand, read, and write the universal world language will be far more rare than the illiterate is today."

There are many reasons why this plan cannot work. The most important one is doubtless that it will never be tried. And it will never be tried because too many of us have recognized as real the problems we associate with the names of Korzybski and Whorf.

It is to be hoped that there will be a revised edition of Pei's book, restricted to Parts I and II—even though there is reason to fear that the whole venture was embarked upon exclusively for the sake of Part III. Minus the part for the sake of which it was written, Pei's book may well become a classic, as Guérard's has.

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**Chemistry of Carbon Compounds.** A modern comprehensive treatise. vol. IV, part A, *Heterocyclic Compounds*. E. H. Rodd, Ed. Elsevier, New York, 1957 (order from Van Nostrand, Princeton, N.J.). xxvi + 807 pp. \$28.

This volume of Rodd is the first of three which will deal with heterocyclic compounds. A remarkable amount of information has been condensed into this book, which describes the synthesis and properties of thiiran, aziridine, oxetan, thietan, azetidine, pyrrole, furan, thiophen, pyrazole, iminazole, oxazole, thiazole, triazole, tetrazole, pyridine, and their hydro derivatives. Benzo derivatives of these compounds (indole, carbazole, quinoline, acridine, and so forth) are also included. The more complex natural products, such as alkaloids and porphyrins, which contain these heterocyclic rings will be discussed in the later volumes. Three of the more esoteric heterocycles described are an oxazacyclobutane (page 27), a derivative of diazacyclopropane (page 20), and 1-azatri-cyclo-[3,3,3,0]undecane bromide (page 137).

The literature has been well covered, and a random check of 200 references showed that 24 percent had their origin in the years 1950–57, 23 percent in 1940–49, and 21 percent in 1930–39. Typographical errors seem to be inevitable in a book of this size. Thirty-one were detected; the majority were missing or extra bonds in the otherwise excellent structural formulae. Structures IX, XII, XIII, and XV on page 241 are incorrect.