

Review of “The Study of Language”

Title	The Study of Language
Author	George Yule
Year of Publication	2010
Edition	Fourth
No. of Pages	320
Place of Publication	Singapore
Publisher	Cambridge University Press

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George Yule’s *The Study of Language* was first published in 1985 and since then, the book has enjoyed a sufficient amount of popularity and success as an introductory textbook to linguistics. Much of the book’s success is due to Yule’s ability to make the information on a subject as vast and complex as linguistics, so accessible to the layman or a beginner in a linguistics course. In his preface, Yule attributed the origins of this book to his experiences in teaching introductory courses on language, and the feedback from his students who “forced (him) to present what (he) wanted to say in a way that they could understand” (p. xvi), and this feature of user-friendliness is an important strength of the book.

True to the objective of making it easier to read, the latest edition of the book provides a clearer division of information into main topics and subtopics. This change is also reflected in the format of the Contents section, with an increase in the number of pages from four in the third edition to ten pages in total for the latest edition. The detailed Contents section makes it particularly convenient for the reader to glean and locate the information presented in each chapter. Another marked revision is the move of the chapter on *Writing* to the later section of the book as Chapter 16. Other more important revisions and additions include new accounts of language origins in Chapter 1, text messaging in Chapter 16, kinship terms in Chapter 20 and more than twenty new word etymologies, as well as fifty new tasks to help students apply what they have learned. In addition to the revisions, the visuals at the beginning of each chapter and the larger font size also contribute to making the latest edition more attractive and easier to read. The general impression of the fourth edition of this book on the reader is that it is a well-revised and thought out textbook, and like all respectable textbooks, the publisher also provides a new online Study Guide www.cambridge.org/yule to help enhance students’ learning.

As an introductory textbook to linguistics, *The Study of Language* is well-organised in terms of content and almost effortless to follow. Each of the chapters follows a similar pattern, moving from a brief general context-setting preview to a more focused discussion of the topic. This 20-chapter book kick-starts with a discussion on the various speculations on the origins of language, before delving into a discussion on the properties of human language and a review of experiments in communication involving humans and animals in Chapter 2. Sensitive to a beginner’s lack of linguistic knowledge, the first two chapters in the book are helpful in providing the reader with an overview of what makes human language unique, before launching into a more rapt discussion on linguistics. In Chapter 3, which replaces the former chapter on *Writing*, Yule introduces the reader

to the subject area of phonetics before advancing to phonology in the subsequent chapter. Following the introduction to the sounds and sound patterns of language, the reader is led into an exploration of the basic processes by which new words are created in Chapter 5, before moving on to Morphology in Chapter 6. What ensues is a discussion on the topic of Grammar in Chapter 7 and Syntax in Chapter 8, which help tie together the threads in the earlier chapters. The reader is then introduced to the study of meaning in language with Semantics in Chapter 9 and Pragmatics in Chapter 10.

Having introduced the reader to the core components in linguistics, Yule tackles the more practical and controversial issues of language use and features, starting with Discourse Analysis in Chapter 11. The twelfth chapter leads the reader to an understanding of how the human brain works in relation to speech, before uncovering the various developmental stages involved in first language acquisition in Chapter 13, and second language acquisition/learning in Chapter 14. In Chapter 15, Yule engages the reader in a lively discussion on American Sign Language, and challenges the reader to reassess the notion of language. The next chapter on Writing, which was initially in the earlier chapters of the book, is aptly placed and moved between the discussions on language acquisition and the historical development of the English Language in the recent edition of the book, because although writing is a symbolic representation of language, it is not an acquired skill, but a “sustained conscious effort” (p. 212). The Writing chapter flows smoothly after a discussion on language acquisition and ultimately, prepares the reader for the discussion on the evolution of English and other languages in Chapter 17. The last three chapters of the book deal with discussions on the various aspects of sociolinguistics, starting with language and regional variation in Chapter 18, language and social variation in Chapter 19, and ending with language and culture in Chapter 20. All in all, there is no fault with the organization of the chapters in the book, but perhaps to reinforce the objective of user-friendliness, the author could divide the chapters into different sections, such as Chapters 3 to 8 could be grouped under a section labeled “The Study of Language Structure”, and Chapters 9 and 10 could be categorized under “The Study of Meaning”.

Having been trialed and tested, *The Study of Language* is a highly recommended textbook for an introductory course to Linguistics or Language Studies. Coupled with a comprehensive glossary providing clear explanations of linguistics terminology and references for further reading after each chapter, the book is useful for both the instructor and the learner. The comprehensive coverage of linguistics and the clear organisational structure of the book allow an instructor easy access to planning a course syllabus and to deriving ideas for tutorial questions and assignment projects. There is also adequate material for the individual student to use for independent learning in the form of study questions, tasks and discussion topics/projects, which are also designed to engage students as proactive learners at the same time. For readers or students whose interests are piqued enough to read further on a particular topic, the book also provides a user-friendly reading list with sub-categories at the end of each chapter. Apart from its scholarly feature, *The Study of Language* is a delightfully entertaining book for anyone who is keen to find out more about linguistics.