The Study of Language

This best-selling textbook provides an engaging and user-friendly introduction to the study of language. Assuming no prior knowledge of the subject, Yule presents information in short, bite-sized sections, introducing the major concepts in language study – from how children learn language to why men and women speak differently, through all the key elements of language. This fourth edition has been revised and updated with twenty new sections, covering new accounts of language origins, the key properties of language, text messaging, kinship terms and more than twenty new word etymologies. To increase student engagement with the text, Yule has also included more than fifty new tasks, including thirty involving data analysis, enabling students to apply what they have learned. The online study guide offers students further resources when working on the tasks, while encouraging lively and proactive learning. This is the most fundamental and easy-to-use introduction to the study of language.

George Yule has taught Linguistics at the Universities of Edinburgh, Hawai‘i, Louisiana State and Minnesota. He is the author of a number of books, including Discourse Analysis (with Gillian Brown, 1983) and Pragmatics (1996).
“A genuinely introductory linguistics text, well suited for undergraduates who have little prior experience thinking descriptively about language. Yule’s crisp and thought-provoking presentation of key issues works well for a wide range of students.”

Elise Morse-Gagne, Tougaloo College

“The Study of Language is one of the most accessible and entertaining introductions to linguistics available. Newly updated with a wealth of material for practice and discussion, it will continue to inspire new generations of students.”

Stephen Matthews, University of Hong Kong

‘Its strength is in providing a general survey of mainstream linguistics in palatable, easily manageable and logically organised chunks. The chapter divisions allow for considerable flexibility, which has proved particularly important after recently restructuring our courses and reorganising the order in which to cover the topics.’

Nigel Musk, University of Linköping

“Perfect for the beginners’ level introductory linguistics course, both in style and content.”

Hugh Buckingham, Professor of Linguistics, Louisiana State University

“Very clear and easy to read for beginners; user-friendly and non-threatening . . . ; chapters are in absorbable bite-size chunks.”

Jean Aitchison, Professor of Language and Communication, University of Oxford

“An impressive breadth of coverage . . . clear presentation, lucid style and accessibility . . . a solid foundation for further study in linguistics as well as being a pleasure to read in its own right.”

Alan Smith, Web Journal of Modern Language Linguistics
### Contents

**Preface**  page xv

**1 The origins of language**  1
- The divine source  2
- The natural sound source  2
- The social interaction source  3
- The physical adaptation source  4
  - Teeth, lips, mouth, larynx and pharynx  4
- The tool-making source  5
- The genetic source  6

**Study questions**  7
**Tasks**  7
**Discussion topics/projects**  8
**Further reading**  8

**2 Animals and human language**  10
- Communication  11
- Properties of human language  11
  - Displacement  11
  - Arbitrariness  12
  - Productivity  13
  - Cultural transmission  14
  - Duality  15
- Talking to animals  15
- Chimpanzees and language  16
  - Washoe  16
  - Sarah and Lana  17
  - The controversy  18
  - Kanzi  19
- Using language  19
- Study questions  21
3 The sounds of language

Phonetics 26
Voiced and voiceless sounds 26
Place of articulation 27
  Bilabials 28
  Labiodentals 28
  Dentals 28
  Alveolars 28
  Palatals 29
  Velars 29
  Glottals 30

Charting consonant sounds 30
  Limitations of the chart 30

Manner of articulation 31
  Stops 31
  Fricatives 31
  Affricates 32
  Nasals 32
  Liquids 32
  Glides 32
  Glottal stops and flaps 33

Vowels 33
  Diphthongs 34
  Subtle individual variation 35

Study questions 37

Tasks 38
Discussion topics/projects 38
Further reading 39

4 The sound patterns of language

Phonology 42
Phonemes 42
Phones and allophones 43
Minimal pairs and sets 44
Phonotactics 45
Syllables 45
  Consonant clusters 46
Contents

Coarticulation effects 46
  Assimilation 47
  Elision 47
  Normal speech 48
Study questions 49
Tasks 49
Discussion topics/projects 50
Further reading 50
5 Word formation 52
  Etymology 53
  Coinage 53
  Borrowing 54
  Compounding 55
  Blending 55
  Clipping 56
  Backformation 56
  Conversion 57
  Acronyms 58
  Derivation 58
    Prefixes and suffixes 59
    Infixes 59
    Kamhmu 59
Multiple processes 60
Study questions 61
Tasks 61
Discussion topics/projects 63
Further reading 64
6 Morphology 66
  Morphology 67
  Morphemes 67
    Free and bound morphemes 68
    Lexical and functional morphemes 68
    Derivational and inflectional morphemes 69
  Morphological description 70
    Problems in morphological description 71
  Morphs and allomorphs 71
Other languages 72
  Kanuri 72
  Ganda 73
# Contents

**Ilocano** 73  
**Tagalog** 74  
Study questions 75  
Tasks 75  
Discussion topics/projects 77  
Further reading 78  

## 7 Grammar 80  
Grammar 81  
Traditional grammar 81  
*The parts of speech* 82  
Agreement 83  
Grammatical gender 84  
Traditional analysis 84  
The prescriptive approach 85  
*Captain Kirk’s infinitive* 86  
The descriptive approach 86  
*Structural analysis* 87  
Constituent analysis 88  
*Labeled and bracketed sentences* 89  
*A Gaelic sentence* 90  
Study questions 92  
Tasks 92  
Discussion topics/projects 94  
Further reading 95  

## 8 Syntax 96  
Syntax 97  
*Deep and surface structure* 97  
*Structural ambiguity* 98  
Recursion 98  
Tree diagrams 99  
Symbols used in syntactic analysis 100  
Phrase structure rules 102  
Lexical rules 102  
Movement rules 103  
Back to recursion 105  
*Complement phrases* 105  
Study questions 107  
Tasks 108
## Contents

Discussion topics/projects 109  
Further reading 110  

### 9 Semantics 112  
Meaning 113  
Semantic features 113  
Semantic roles 115  
   Agent and theme 115  
   Instrument and experiencer 116  
   Location, source and goal 116  
Lexical relations 116  
   Synonymy 117  
   Antonymy 117  
   Hyponymy 118  
   Prototypes 119  
   Homophones and homonyms 120  
   Polysemy 120  
   Word play 121  
   Metonymy 121  
Collocation 121  
Study questions 123  
Tasks 123  
Discussion topics/projects 124  
Further reading 125  

### 10 Pragmatics 127  
Pragmatics 128  
Context 129  
   Deixis 130  
Reference 131  
   Inference 131  
   Anaphora 132  
   Presupposition 133  
Speech acts 133  
   Direct and indirect speech acts 134  
Politeness 135  
   Negative and positive face 135  
Study questions 137  
Tasks 137  
Discussion topics/projects 139  
Further reading 140
# Contents

## 11 Discourse analysis 141
- Discourse analysis 142
- Interpreting discourse 142
  - **Cohesion** 143  
  - **Coherence** 144
  - **Speech events** 145
- Conversation analysis 145
  - **Turn-taking** 146
- The co-operative principle 147
  - **Hedges** 148
  - **Implicatures** 148
- Background knowledge 149
  - **Schemas and scripts** 150
- Study questions 152
- Tasks 152
- Discussion topics/projects 154
- Further reading 155

## 12 Language and the brain 156
- Neurolinguistics 157
  - Language areas in the brain 157
    - **Broca’s area** 158
    - **Wernicke’s area** 159
    - **The motor cortex and the arcuate fasciculus** 159
    - **The localization view** 159
- Tongue tips and slips 160
  - **The tip of the tongue phenomenon** 160
  - **Slips of the tongue** 161
  - **Slips of the ear** 161
- Aphasia 162
  - **Broca’s aphasia** 162
  - **Wernicke’s aphasia** 163
  - **Conduction aphasia** 163
- Dichotic listening 164
- The critical period 165
  - **Genie** 166
- Study questions 167
- Tasks 167
- Discussion topics/projects 168
- Further reading 169
Contents

13 First language acquisition  170
   Acquisition  171
      Input  171
   The acquisition schedule  172
      Cooing and babbling  173
      The one-word stage  174
      The two-word stage  174
      Telegraphic speech  175
   The acquisition process  175
   Developing morphology  176
   Developing syntax  177
      Forming questions  178
      Forming negatives  179
   Developing semantics  179
   Study questions  182
   Tasks  182
   Discussion topics/projects  183
   Further reading  184

14 Second language acquisition/learning  186
   Second language learning  187
      Acquisition and learning  187
      Acquisition barriers  187
      Affective factors  188
   Focus on method  189
      The grammar–translation method  189
      The audiolingual method  190
      Communicative approaches  190
   Focus on the learner  190
      Transfer  191
      Interlanguage  191
      Motivation  192
      Input and output  192
   Communicative competence  194
   Applied linguistics  194
   Study questions  195
   Tasks  195
   Discussion topics/projects  196
   Further reading  197
Contents

15 Gestures and sign languages 198
   Gestures 199
      Types of gestures 199
   Types of sign languages 200
   Oralism 200
   Signed English 201
   Origins of ASL 202
   The structure of signs 202
      Shape and orientation 203
      Location and movement 203
      Primes, faces and finger-spelling 204
   The meaning of signs 204
   Representing signs 206
   ASL as a natural language 207
   Study questions 208
   Tasks 208
   Discussion topics/projects 209
   Further reading 209

16 Writing 211
   Writing 212
   Pictograms and ideograms 213
   Logograms 214
      Rebus writing 215
   Syllabic writing 215
   Alphabetic writing 216
   Written English 217
      English orthography 218
   Study questions 220
   Tasks 220
   Discussion topics/projects 222
   Further reading 223

17 Language history and change 224
   Family trees 225
      Family connections 226
      Cognates 226
   Comparative reconstruction 227
      Sound reconstruction 227
      Word reconstruction 228
Contents

The history of English 228
    Old English 229
    Middle English 229
    Sound changes 231
    Syntactic changes 232
    Semantic changes 233
Diachronic and synchronic variation 233
Study questions 235
Tasks 235
Discussion topics/projects 236
Further reading 237

18 Language and regional variation 239
    The standard language 240
    Accent and dialect 240
    Dialectology 241
        Regional dialects 241
        Isoglosses and dialect boundaries 242
        The dialect continuum 244
    Bilingualism and diglossia 244
    Language planning 246
    Pidgins and creoles 247
        The post-creole continuum 248
Study questions 250
Tasks 250
Discussion topics/projects 251
Further reading 251

19 Language and social variation 253
    Sociolinguistics 254
        Social dialects 254
        Education and occupation 255
        Social markers 256
    Speech style and style-shifting 257
        Prestige 257
        Speech accommodation 258
        Register and jargon 259
        Slang 259
    African American English 260
        Vernacular language 261
        The sounds of a vernacular 261
## Contents

The grammar of a vernacular 261  
Study questions 263  
Tasks 263  
Discussion topics/projects 264  
Further reading 264

20 Language and culture 266  
Culture 267  
Categories 267  
Kinship terms 268  
Time concepts 268  
Linguistic relativity 269  
The Sapir–Whorf hypothesis 269  
Snow 270  
Cognitive categories 271  
Classifiers 272  
Social categories 272  
Address terms 273  
Gender 274  
Gendered words 274  
Gendered speech 275  
Gendered interaction 276  
Study questions 278  
Tasks 278  
Discussion topics/projects 279  
Further reading 280

Glossary 282  
References 297  
Index 307
Preface

This new edition

Extensive feedback from instructors during the writing of the fourth edition of *The Study of Language* brought forth suggestions for improvements and some excellent advice – many thanks to all. These suggestions have resulted in:

- a change in the overall organization of the book, with Writing moving to Chapter 16.
- revision of the internal organization of some chapters, with a clearer division of the material into main topics and subtopics, with additional topics including new accounts of language origins, text messaging, kinship terms and more than twenty new word etymologies.
- over fifty new Tasks, including thirty that involve data analysis, so that students can apply what they’ve learned.
- a new online Study Guide www.cambridge.org/yule to help students with those Tasks.

I hope these revisions will make the book easier to read and generally more user-friendly.

To the student

In *The Study of Language* I have tried to present a comprehensive survey of what is known about language and also of the methods used by linguists in arriving at that knowledge. There have been many interesting developments in the study of language over the past two decades, but it is still a fact that any individual speaker of a language has a more comprehensive “unconscious” knowledge of how language works than any linguist has yet been able to describe. So, as you read the following chapters, take a critical view of the effectiveness of the descriptions, the analyses, and the generalizations by measuring them against your own intuitions about how your language works. By the end of the book, you should then feel that you do know quite a lot about both the internal structure of language (its form) and the varied uses of language in
human life (its function), and also that you are ready to ask the kinds of questions that professional linguists ask when they conduct their research.

This revised edition is designed to make your learning task easier and more interesting:

- Topics are split into manageable subtopics.
- Learning is active with Study Questions at the end of each chapter, as a way for you to check that you have understood some of the main points or important terms introduced in that chapter. They should be answered without too much difficulty, but to support you a set of suggested answers is available in the Study Guide online.
- Tasks at the end of chapters give you an opportunity to explore related concepts and types of analysis that go beyond the material presented in the chapter. The online Study Guide again supports your learning with analysis, suggested answers and resources for all these tasks. The Discussion Topics and Projects found at the end of each topic provide an opportunity for you to consider some of the larger issues in the study of language, to think about some of the controversies that arise with certain topics and to try to focus your own opinions on different language-related issues.
- To help you find out more about the issues covered in this book, each chapter ends with a set of Further Readings that lead you to more detailed treatments than are possible in this introduction.

**Origins of this book**

This book can be traced back to introductory courses on language taught at the University of Edinburgh, the University of Minnesota and Louisiana State University, and to the suggestions and criticisms of hundreds of students who forced me to present what I had to say in a way they could understand. An early version of the written material was developed for Independent Study students at the University of Minnesota. Later versions have had the benefit of expert advice from a lot of teachers working with diverse groups in different situations. I am particularly indebted to Professor Hugh Buckingham, Louisiana State University, for sharing his expertise and enthusiasm over many years as a colleague and friend.

For help in creating the first and second editions, I would like to acknowledge my debt to Gill Brown, Keith Brown, Penny Carter, Feride Erkü, Diana Fritz, Kathleen Houlihan, Tom McArthur, Jim Miller, Rocky Miranda, Eric Nelson, Sandra Pinkerton, Rich Reardon, Gerald Sanders, Elaine Tarone and Michele Trufant.

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In creating this new edition, I have also benefited from reader surveys conducted by Sarah Wightman and Andrew Winnard, as well as the work of many others in the excellent production team at Cambridge University Press.

For my own introductory course, I remain indebted to Willie and Annie Yule, and, for my continuing enlightenment, to Maryann Overstreet.