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
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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 Erkül, 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.