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978-0-521-76527-5 - The Study of Language, Fourth Edition  
George Yule  
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### **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."

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"*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*

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*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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Fourth edition

GEORGE YULE



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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521749220](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521749220)

First and second editions © Cambridge University Press 1985, 1996

Third and fourth editions © George Yule 2006, 2010

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First published 1985  
Second edition 1996  
Third edition 2006  
Fourth edition 2010

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

ISBN 978-0-521-76527-5 Hardback  
ISBN 978-0-521-74922-0 Paperback

Additional resources for this publication at [www.cambridge.org/yule](http://www.cambridge.org/yule)

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# Preface

## This new edition

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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](http://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

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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

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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.

For feedback and advice in the preparation of the third and fourth editions, I would like to thank Jean Aitchison (University of Oxford), Linda Blanton (University of New



Orleans), Hugh W. Buckingham (Louisiana State University), Karen Currie (Federal University of Espiritu Santo), Mary Anna Dimitrakopoulos (Indiana University, South Bend), Thomas Field (University of Maryland, Baltimore), Anthony Fox (University of Leeds), Luisa Garro (New York University), Gordon Gibson (University of Paisley), Katinka Hammerich (University of Florida), Raymond Hickey (Essen University), Richard Hirsch (Linköping University), Fiona Joseph (University of Wolverhampton), Eliza Kitis (Aristotle University), Terrie Mathis (California State University, Northridge), Stephen Matthews (University of Hong Kong), Jens Reinke (Christian Albrechts Universität zu Kiel), Philip Riley (Université de Nancy 2), Rick Santos (Fresno City College), Joanne Scheibman (Old Dominion University), Royal Skousen (Brigham Young University), Michael Stubbs (Universität Trier), Mary Talbot (University of Sunderland) and Sherman Wilcox (University of New Mexico).

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.