The Study of Language

FIFTH EDITION

George Yule

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Preface

In this new edition

For all their advice and suggestions for improvements to the fifth edition of this book, I'd like to thank the reviewers, instructors, students and researchers who have commented on earlier versions. I have made a number of revisions in the internal organization of all the chapters, with a clearer division into major topics and subsections. Additional section headings have been included to make the material more accessible and a number of extra examples from everyday language use are offered to make some of the points clearer. There are also more substantial revisions in Chapters 3 (Phonetics), 4 (Phonology), 5 (Word formation) and 8 (Syntax) that should make these units more manageable. I hope these revisions will make the book more informative, easier to read, and overall more user-friendly.

In addition, there are thirty new tasks. The majority of these are data-based and designed to foster problem-solving and critical-thinking skills. New examples from languages as diverse as German, Hawaiian, Hungarian, Lakhota, Proto-Polynesian, Quechua, Spanish and Tamasheq provide an opportunity to explore further aspects of languages other than English. Additional topics explored in the study of the English language include adjective order, adverb position in sentences, American and British differences, compounds, general extenders, the presuppositions of jokes, recasts, stylistics, synecdoche and vague language. An expanded and revised Study Guide providing answers and tutorials for all the tasks can be found on the book's website: www.cambridge.org/yule.

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. Consequently, as you read each of 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 feel that you do know quite a lot

attested in the vocalizations made by human infants during their first year, no matter which language their parents are using.

Mouth and tongue

The human **mouth** is relatively small compared to other primates and can be opened and closed rapidly. It is also part of an extended vocal tract that has much more of an L-shape than the fairly straight path from front to back in other mammals. In contrast to the fairly thin flat tongue of other large primates, humans have a shorter, thicker and more muscular **tongue** that can be used to shape a wide variety of sounds inside the oral cavity. In addition, unlike other primates, humans can close off the airway through the nose to create more air pressure in the mouth. The overall effect of these small differences taken together is a face with more intricate muscle interlacing in the lips and mouth, capable of a wider range of shapes and a more rapid and powerful delivery of sounds produced through these different shapes.

Larynx and pharynx

The human **larynx** or "voice box" (containing the vocal folds or vocal cords) differs significantly in position from the larynx of other primates such as monkeys. In the course of human physical development, the assumption of an upright posture moved the head more directly above the spinal column and the larynx dropped to a lower position. This created a longer cavity called the **pharynx**, above the vocal folds, which acts as a resonator for increased range and clarity of the sounds produced via the larynx and the vocal tract. Other primates have almost no pharynx. One unfortunate consequence of this development is that the lower position of the human larynx makes it much more possible for the human to choke on pieces of food. Monkeys may not be able to use their larynx to produce speech sounds, but they do not suffer from the problem of getting food stuck in their windpipe. In evolutionary terms, there must have been a big advantage in getting this extra vocal power (i.e. a larger range of sounds) to outweigh the potential disadvantage from an increased risk of choking to death.

The tool-making source

In the physical adaptation view, one function (producing speech sounds) must have been superimposed on existing anatomical features (teeth, lips) previously used for other purposes (chewing, sucking). A similar development is believed to have taken place with human hands and some believe that manual gestures may have been a precursor of language. By about two million years ago, there is evidence that humans had developed preferential right-handedness and had become capable of making

This almost automatic set of developments and the complexity of the young child's language have led some scholars to look for something more powerful than small physical adaptations of the species over time as the source of language. Even children who are born deaf (and do not develop speech) become fluent sign language users, given appropriate circumstances, very early in life. This seems to indicate that human offspring are born with a special capacity for language. It is innate, no other creature seems to have it, and it isn't tied to a specific variety of language. Is it possible that this language capacity is genetically hard-wired in the newborn human?

As a solution to the puzzle of the origins of language, this **innateness hypothesis** would seem to point to something in human genetics, possibly a crucial mutation, as the source. This would not have been a gradual change, but something that happened rather quickly. We are not sure when this proposed genetic change might have taken place or how it might relate to the physical adaptations described earlier. However, as we consider this hypothesis, we find our speculations about the origins of language moving away from fossil evidence or the physical source of basic human sounds toward analogies with how computers work (e.g. being pre-programmed or hard-wired) and concepts taken from the study of genetics. The investigation of the origins of language then turns into a search for the special "language gene" that only humans possess.

If we are indeed the only creatures with this special capacity for language, then will it be completely impossible for any other creature to produce or understand language? We'll try to answer that question in Chapter 2.

G **(i)** How would you make a retroflex sound?

(ii) How are retroflex sounds identified in phonetic transcription?

(iii) With which varieties of English are retroflex sounds generally associated?

H What is forensic phonetics?

DISCUSSION TOPICS/PROJECTS

I When we concentrate on the articulation of sounds, it's easy to forget that people listening to those sounds often have other clues to help them recognize what we're saying. In front of a mirror (or enlist a cooperative friend to be the speaker), say the following pairs of words. As you are doing this, can you decide which are rounded or unrounded vowels and which are tense or lax vowels? What clues are you using to help you make your decision?

bet/bought, coat/caught, feed/food, late/let, mail/mole, neat/knit

(For background reading, see chapter 5 of Ashby and Maidment, 2005.)

II English has a number of expressions such as *chit-chat* and *flip-flop* which never seem to occur in the reverse order (i.e. not *chat-chit* or *flop-flip*). Perhaps you can add examples to the following list of similar expressions.

criss-cross	***hip-hop***	***riff-raff***
dilly-dally	***knick-knacks***	***see-saw***
ding-dong	***mish-mash***	***sing-song***
fiddle-faddle	***ping-pong***	***tick-tock***
flim-flam	***pitter-patter***	***zig-zag***

(i) Can you think of a phonetic description of the regular pattern of sounds in these expressions?

(ii) What kind of phonetic description might account for these other common pairings?

fuddy-duddy	***hocus-pocus***	***namby-pamby***
fuzzy-wuzzy	***hurly-burly***	***razzle-dazzle***
hanky-panky	***lovey-dovey***	***roly-poly***
helter-skelter	***mumbo-jumbo***	***super-duper***

(For background reading, see chapter 6 of Pinker, 1994.)

FURTHER READING

Basic treatments

Knight, R-A. (2012) *Phonetics: A Course Book* Cambridge University Press

Ladefoged, P. and K. Johnson (2010) *A Course in Phonetics* (6th edition) Wadsworth, Cengage Learning

II In Turkish, there is some variation in the plural inflection.

Singular			Plural	
("man")	*adam*	–	*adamlar*	("men")
("gun")	_____	–	*toplar*	("guns")
("lesson")	*ders*	–	_____	("lessons")
("place")	*yer*	–	*yerler*	("places")
("road")	_____	–	*yollar*	("roads")
("lock")	_____	–	*kilitler*	("locks")
("arrow")	*ok*	–	_____	("arrows")
("hand")	*el*	–	_____	("hands")
("arm")	*kol*	–	_____	("arms")
("bell")	_____	–	*ziller*	("bells")
("friend")	_____	–	*dostlar*	("friends")
("apple")	*elma*	–	_____	("apples")

(i) Can you provide the missing forms?

(ii) What are the two plural morphs exemplified here?

(iii) Treat the written forms of *a* and *o* as representing back vowels and *e* and *i* as representing front vowels. Using this information, can you state the conditions under which each of the plural morphs is used?

(iv) On the basis of the following phrases, how would you describe the Turkish translation equivalents of *your* and the conditions for their use?

dishin ("your tooth")	*topun* ("your gun")
okun ("your arrow")	*dersin* ("your lesson")
kushun ("your bird")	*kibritlerin* ("your matches")

(v) While English usually marks location with prepositions (***in*** *a house* or ***at*** *a place*), Turkish has postpositions (*house-**in*** or *place-**at***). After looking at the following examples, try to identify the three versions of the "location" suffix and the conditions for their use.

("book")	*kitap*	–	*kitapta*	("in a book")
("chair")	*koltuk*	–	*koltukta*	("in a chair")
("room")	*oda*	–	*odada*	("in a room")
("restaurant")	*lokanta*	–	*lokantada*	("in a restaurant")
("house")	*ev*	–	*evde*	("in a house")
("place")	*yer*	–	*yerlerde*	("in places")
("hand")	*el*	–	*ellerimde*	("in my hands")
("road")	*yol*	–	*yollarda*	("in roads)

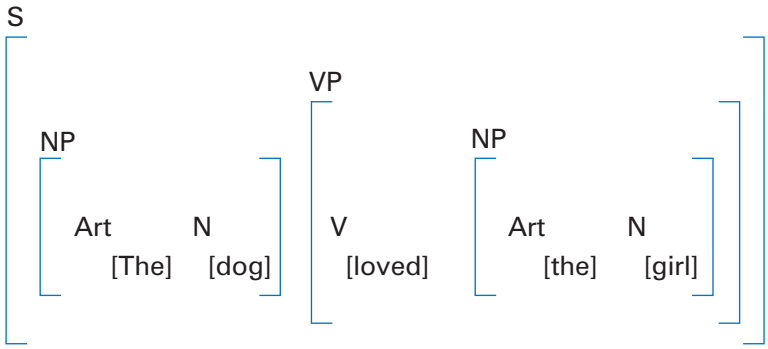

Figure 7.5

We can then label each constituent using these abbreviated grammatical terms:

Art (= article)	V (= verb)
N (= noun)	VP (= verb phrase)
NP (= noun phrase)	S (= sentence)

In Figure 7.5, these labels are placed beside each bracket that marks the beginning of a constituent. The result is a labeled and bracketed analysis of the constituent structure of the sentence.

Hierarchical organization

In performing this type of analysis, we have not only labeled all the constituents, we have revealed the **hierarchical organization** of those constituents. In this hierarchy, the sentence (S) is higher than and contains the noun phrase (NP). The noun phrase (NP) is higher than and contains the noun (N). We can also see that the sentence (S) contains a verb phrase (VP), which contains a verb (V) and another noun phrase (NP). We will return to the important concept of hierarchical organization in grammatical structure in Chapter 8.

Before moving on, however, we should note that constituent analysis is not only useful for describing the structure of English sentences. We can take a sample sentence from a language with a grammatical structure that is really quite different from English and apply the same type of analysis.

A Gaelic sentence

Here is a sentence from Scottish Gaelic, which would be translated into English as: "The boy saw the black dog."

Chunnaic	*an*	*gille*	*an*	*cu*	*dubh*
saw	the	boy	the	dog	black