***An Introduction to Language* (Fifth Edition)** by Victoria Fromkin and Robert Rodman. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1993. xvi + 544 pp.

Reviewed by
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> There have been considerable problems of communication between theoretical linguistics and other disciplines concerned with the study of natural language, and it seems that many psychologists, students of artificial intelligence, applied linguists, and literary critics have abandoned the idea that they could learn very much from the results reached in theoretical linguistics—so much the worse for theoretical linguistics and so much the worse for the interdisciplinary study of natural language.
>
> Peter Bosch
> *Agreement and Anaphora*

In an interdisciplinary field such as applied linguistics, it is important for students to have a good grounding in whichever base disciplines they choose to work within. Although there is debate as to how important theoretical linguistics is to applied linguistics (see for example, *IAL*, 1990), no one can deny that the study of *language* is central to applied linguists' concerns. Once it is agreed that the study of a particular subject is important, the next problem is how to present it to students new to the field in a way that is interesting as well as informative. Large numbers of people in our society seem to have a fear of "grammar," no doubt bred in primary and secondary school classrooms--a fear which follows them well into college. Thus an introductory linguistics textbook must be user-friendly in order to be effective. *An Introduction to Language* is such a textbook, the new (fifth) edition being friendlier than ever.

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The book is specifically designed to serve as a general introduction to the field, providing a broad enough view to be useful to students in various disciplines. It is explicitly *not* designed to be an overview of the current state of linguistics; researchers in other fields wishing to gain a basic understanding of what language is and how it works could start by reading this book, but would require further reading and training to be able to apply any aspect of language study to their field (or vice versa).

An Introduction to Language is divided into five parts: The Nature of Human Language, Grammatical Aspects of Language, Social Aspects of Language, Biological Aspects of Language, and Language in the Computer Age. Part One consists of one chapter, What is Language?, which provides answers to basic questions about what human language is and how it differs from nonhuman communication. Part Two comprises the next five chapters of the book, on morphology, syntax, semantics (including sections on discourse and pragmatics), phonetics, and phonology (in that (new) order). Part Three has chapters on sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, and writing systems. Part Four now only includes chapters on acquisition and human language processing, with computer processing separated into a full chapter in the new Part Five.

Each part, chapter and section, and many a subsection, begins with a quote or two, making the content seem relevant to everyday concerns, or highlighting an upcoming linguistic concept. The people quoted range from St. Augustine to Walt Whitman, from Noam Chomsky to Edward Sapir (although strangely the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, a well-known concept that might be appealing to linguistics novices or students of linguistic anthropology, is never mentioned[1]). Each chapter ends with a summary, followed by references for further reading and exercises; the appendix contains a glossary and index. For convenient reference, phonetic charts are reproduced inside the covers: A phonetic alphabet for English pronunciation, the articulatory classification of American English nonvowel sounds, and a labeled drawing of the human articulatory system. The previous edition also included a phonetic feature chart; its omission from front-cover position is consistent with the new edition's revision: The phonetic feature chart is omitted from the phonetics chapter, and a phonemic feature chart is added in the phonology chapter.

Other revisions in content include the addition of linguistic examples, and the incorporation of recent research in various areas. For example, the section Styles, Slang, and Jargon in Chapter 7 includes a reference to Munro's (1989) book on college slang; the section The Autonomy of Language in Chapter 11 reports on recent studies of linguistically competent people who are otherwise severely intellectually handicapped; the section Can Chimps Learn Human Language? in Chapter 10 summarizes the latest study involving a chimpanzee's ability to manipulate symbols. In order to make the new edition more up-to-date and less theoretically specialized, some information has been deleted, such as the references to "move alpha" in the syntax chapter, and to meaning postulates in the semantics chapter. Those familiar with the fourth edition will also find changes in some of the end-of-chapter exercises.

Two aspects which have made earlier editions of this book so approachable and entertaining, the design and the cartoons, have also been revised. Many of the chapter sections of the new edition have been further subdivided with new headings, making it easy to flip through the table of contents or the chapters to find particular topics. As in the previous edition, all key words and concepts are boldfaced, both in the chapter and in the chapter summaries; this presumably helps students locate and remember important terms. New cartoons have been added, such as the *New Yorker*'s "Further Studies in Pigeon English." (Of course, some of the good old ones had to be taken out to make room.)

One of the strengths of *Introduction* is its coverage of important linguistic research in areas which have traditionally been neglected. An example is the section Language and Sexism which spans topics from the derivation of the word *hussy* to the higher pitch of women's voices. The subsection, The Generic "He", includes an added example of an 18th century use of *they* with the singular antecedent a *person*, and an elaboration of the history of the false generic *he*. Admirably, the authors have weeded out possible instances of linguistic sexism on their own part: A sentence in the fourth edition which began "if you hear a man clearing his throat" (p. 32) has been changed to "if you heard someone clearing their throat" (p. 177), with a footnote explaining the use of the third person plural as a gender neutral singular.

Another such area is sign language. In Chapter 1, the authors make a point of mentioning that sign languages maintain the same arbitrary relationship between form and meaning as do spoken languages. A whole section is devoted to describing American Sign Language (ASL) history, structure, and acquisition. (This inclusion of a highly studied language would not be so extraordinary were it not for the appalling fact that other introductory textbooks[2] only mention ASL with respect to its (purported) use in experiments teaching language to primates.[3]) Nevertheless, the authors still marginalize sign languages rather than treating them on a par with spoken languages. The ASL section is inserted in the chapter on language acquisition, mostly, it appears, to make a point about the biological nature of human language. Future editions could further legitimize sign languages by incorporating examples from different sign languages of the world into the content of the chapters. Seeing in practice that specific aspects of sign language grammars (including phonology!) can be compared to those of spoken languages would help students new to language study understand what makes sign "real" language.

A third noteworthy inclusion is the detailed section on Black English (BE), including short descriptions of some aspects of its phonology, syntax and history. However, this section could have done with more revision. First, BE is defined as being "spoken by a large section of non-middle-class African-Americans" (p. 287). While early studies of BE did focus on urban working class speakers, more recent research has turned up certain features which are common to middle class blacks as well (Marcyliena Morgan, personal communication). Examples are the glottal coarticulation accompanying devoicing of stressed final voiced stops (Fasold, 1981), and the "semi-auxiliary" *come*, where *come* is used aspectually to express indignation rather than as a main verb (Spears, 1982). The complexities of defining a socio-cultural (as opposed to regional) dialect are especially evident in research on BE: Among relevant factors are age-grading, sex-grading, status-grading, and peer-group influence (Dillard, 1972). In order for students to better grasp what is at issue in defining dialects such as BE and Chicano English (to which a section is also devoted), it would be worth the space to include further discussion of sociolinguistic variables.

While the new edition looks slick and well put together in general, an apparent lack of thorough proofreading has resulted in numerous spelling errors, word substitutions, and style inconsistencies; some examples follow. There are at least two instances of a linguist's name being misspelled in one place in the book, though correctly in another. In the table given in the front of the book and in Chapter 5, A Phonetic Alphabet for English Pronunciation, *bait* (instead of *bite*) is given as an example word for the sound [aj]. The acronym for my and Fromkin's university is given as "UCLA" in one chapter, but "U.C.L.A." in another. While the errors range from the serious to the trivial, all suggest some carelessness, probably on the part of the editors. There is one positive side-effect of the mistakes, however: They allow observant students to delight in catching them.

The fact that I have chosen to critique such particular aspects of the textbook is evidence of its general thoroughness and clarity. Fromkin and Rodman are obviously dedicated to presenting the subject of linguistics in a format which is not only comprehensive and informative, but relevant and entertaining. Beginning students of linguistics, however they eventually choose to apply their new knowledge, will continue to be well-served by this introduction to the field.

NOTES

[1] For an example of how the hypothesis could be discussed at an introductory level, see Finegan & Besnier (1989, p. 22).

[2] Those I am familiar with are: O'Grady, Dobrovolsky & Aronoff (1989) (reviewed by Stephen Adewole, in *IAL*, vol. 1, no. 1, June 1990), and Finegan & Besnier (1989). Akmajian et al. (1990) give a good description of ASL in their glossary, but in the text only mention ASL apart from ape studies in a parenthetical note on "slips of the hand."

[3] In a critique of some of these experiments, Seidenberg & Petitto (1979) point out that the apes were not exposed to fluent, inflected ASL as used by deaf people, but a simplified use of individual ASL signs. Wallman (1992), in a general critical evaluation of ape/language studies, also discusses the use and interpretation of sign by researchers. The claim that the primates were even exposed to ASL (no less used it) is doubtful at best.

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