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Exploring language in global contexts

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2 Exploring language in global contexts

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BOOK REVIEW

Exploring language in global contexts, edited by Jeffrey Gil and Sky Marsen, London, Routledge, 2022, 152 pp., \$34.36 (paperback), \$128 (hardback), ISBN 9781032146003

The book's editors, Jeffrey Gil and Sky Marsen, include a readable and exciting textbook that simplifies the complexities of language by examining how it is used and learned in several settings. By highlighting the influence of society, culture, and history on the language, this book provides an accessible introduction to the several subfields of linguistics. The acquisition of first and second languages, the construction of meaning, the pragmatics of communication, the role of technology in language, linguistic diversity, and the globalization of English are all discussed. This book provides a broad overview of key concepts and demonstrates how to put them into practice through guided exercises and group discussions. Students in linguistics, sociology, anthropology, and media studies will find this an indispensable resource. Many topics are covered in the book's eight chapters, all of which were authored by different authors.

Jeffrey Gil and Sky Marsen's *'How does language work?'* Chapter 1 adopts an eclectic approach and investigates language from these many vantage points. Five distinguishing elements of human language's architecture set it apart from the linguistic repertoires of other species. Some examples are moving away from one's home, having one's culture transmitted to them, and being productive while also being dualistic. *'How can we learn our native tongue and other languages?'* by Mai Tuyet Ngo explores this question in Chapter 2. First, it examines the universal procedures and phases of learning any human language for the first time. It also explores the benefits of learning a second language early on and the major theories that explain how people acquire their first language. Then it delves into the leading hypotheses on how it picks up a new tongue. Moreover, this chapter also discusses the fundamental ideas and instructional strategies for teaching a second language in a classroom context.

The third chapter, *'What is Language Made of?'*, by Javier Diaz Martinez, investigates the characteristics of human speech and how they differ from those of other animals. This section provides an overview of the several linguistic subfields that specialize in studying language's structural components. Next, it examines many grammatical theories and concepts and discusses what grammar is and what it does. Finally, there is a discussion of the historical developments in grammatical studies that have helped shed light on the similarities and distinctions among human languages and the social context in which they are used. Next, Sky Marsen addresses the question, *'How do we make meaning with language?'* in Chapter 4 of her book. In this chapter, she explains that natural language is a mediated form of communication due to the arbitrary and symbolic nature of linguistic signs and the socio-contextual influence on the meanings attributed to words. The chapter provides a broad overview of the fields of semiotics and pragmatics in the study of language. In this article, we examine the idea of arbitrariness that permits language to acquire symbolic (i.e., not literal) meanings and connotations. The tradition of speech act theory and performative utterances then expands to investigate how language is used in context to enact various changes in the world. It explores these ideas to shed light on how words can be misunderstood or misconstrued, resulting in misunderstandings between speakers and readers. This chapter does so by centering on the social context of language and its implication.

Specifically, in this book's fifth chapter, *'How Does Technology Impact Language Use?'*, Antonella Strambi and Olga Sanchez Castro's research examines the development and evolution of texting-specific lingo. How users negotiate the shifting affordances and constraints of technology to accomplish their unique linguistic and interpersonal goals is explored, as is the impact of technology on communication. It closely examines the linguistic modifications that may be traced back to the

rise of texting, defines the unique characteristics of 'textspeak', and reflects on how the communication medium relates to personal, social, and contextual factors. This chapter ends with a brief examination of some potential benefits and pitfalls of texting for language learners. Christele Mazonniaux explores the various causes of linguistic diversity in Chapter 6, titled '*How do languages vary?*'. Some definitional groundwork is laid, and examples of linguistic diversity are examined. It then delves into how linguistic diversity influences public and private spheres. Using Europe as an example, this chapter explores positive and negative perspectives on linguistic diversity and highlights some current statistics about accent discrimination. It also explains why different varieties of language should be celebrated. Finally, this chapter examines the presence or absence of linguistic variance in language curricula and discusses potential approaches to incorporating linguistic diversity into language instruction.

The question of '*How does a language become global?*', is explored in Chapter 7 of Jeffrey Gil's book. First, it defines a global language and traces the political, economic, cultural, and linguistic shifts that made English a universal language. Second, it may draw a template for characterizing the current state of English and how it is used around the globe. Third, there are positive and negative consequences of English's global prominence on individuals, communities, and other languages and cultures. In this chapter, the most salient of these are discussed. Finally, it explores potential futures for language use worldwide and the elements that could impede English's progress toward becoming a truly global language. The most important points about language and its use are summarized in Chapter 8, '*What do we (not) know about language?*', by Jeffrey Gil and Sky Marsen. Some points of contention regarding its linguistic comprehension are highlighted, and potential study pathways into unexplored facets of language are considered.

The chapters in this book investigate language from these many perspectives using an eclectic approach. Humans are not the only communicating species. Additionally, language has a fundamentally social aspect and is molded by social interaction (Mondada 2016). This capacity is limited only by human cognition and imagination, as well as physical and societal limitations such as memory or etiquette. Although the structure of each language imposes some limitations on the expression of human cognition, humans can communicate anything they can conceive. This is a unique and fascinating book about the design aspects of human language, global language, and language technology that will inspire and instruct students, teachers, academics, researchers, software developers, and administrators. In addition, this book provides several resources and perspectives to aid readers in exploring language in global contexts.

Reference

Mondada, L. 2016. "Challenges of Multimodality: Language and the Body in Social Interaction." *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 20 (3): 336–366. https://doi.org/10.1111/josl.1_12177.


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