

GEOFFREY FINCH, ed. **Word of Mouth: An Introduction to Language and Communication.** 2003. Palgrave Macmillan. Pp. xii, 228.

This wonderful and informative work is meant to be a general introduction to the linguistic fundamentals of language and communication. In parallel with these two valuable subjects, F provides a description of language in relationship to specific social fields - in other words, the applications of language within the framework of systems, such as media (including cyberspace), social function/interaction, and psychology.

Beginning with a discussion of the theoretical origins of language, F proposes that language is an inherent human trait, all but unlearnable by other species. "Language is a code lightyears ahead of animal codes" (27). The evolution of language is drawn in an overall picture from its earliest prehistoric beginnings to the current post-2000 era. F reviews the earliest periods of the appearance of language, the development of alphabetical writing and the continued evolution of electronic language. Firstly, F provides three theories regarding the origin of language: that language (or, more likely, some words) originated from hunters imitating the sounds of the animals they hunted; from noises, for example, "grunts and groans", involved with moving heavy objects or through strenuous physical activity; and from instinctive noises emitted in reaction to pain, pleasure, anger, fear, etc (11). Secondly, with respect to alphabetical writing, F states that written communication was initially represented by drawings, but this has evolved to the point that any current connection between a letter and the sound it represents is solely by convention. However, I suppose that F neglects to consider the full 25% of the world's present population which uses pictographic characters: more than 1.3 billion Chinese, plus hundreds of millions of Japanese and Koreans (although there is a Korean alphabet, the language utilizes a substantial number of Chinese characters). With the relatively recent introduction of alphabetic systems for these aforementioned languages (roman alphabet based phonetic symbols for Chinese and Japanese), and due to the need for alphabetic systems in order to use computers, the languages using pictographic writing, primarily Chinese and Japanese, are being forced into alphabetic

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systems. Thirdly, regarding electronic language, the language of computing has deeply penetrated all aspects of our consciousness; the human brain is routinely described as a "processor," programmed to perform in a certain way.

In his discussion of "language universals" GF states the obvious, that all languages consist of the basic elements of nouns, verbs, noun phrases, verb phrases and sentences. In essence, GF is providing what can only be considered as a relatively superficial overview, particularly when compared to the scholarly works on this subject by such noted experts as Greenberg (Typological Universals) or Chomsky (Universal Grammar). GF gives an interesting review of the evolution of English language and grammar; his reasoning, although brief and somewhat cursory, is appropriate for the general audience for whom this book is written.

GF also discusses the conceptual sense of language, which consists of semantic features and connotative meaning. Conceptual sense is vital, in that it is required in order to achieve communicative competence. GF explains that regardless of the language, processes of reference and significance must be utilized and must draw on the resources of metaphor in order to expand expressive capabilities. He details this function, discussing points such as the literal versus figurative versus colloquial meanings of, for example, the word "up" (46).

In his section on "Language and Society" GF examines the social implications of silence, the need for "small talk" and the psychological motivations behind these needs. He also discusses the cultural variations in, for example, telephone etiquette in various countries and cultures; this interesting information offers a great deal of substantive insight.

GF also offers an overview discussion of the various sections of the brain and their relative function. His chart, which defines and illustrates the frontal lobe, central sulcus, parietal lobe, lateral fissure, occipital lobe, et cetera, is interesting and quite adequate for this introductory book.

The Foundation for Endangered Languages (Crystal, 2000) estimates that there are currently 6000 to 7000 living languages. As English becomes more ubiquitous than ever before as the

world's "global" language, "globalization" is obviously a phenomenon with potentially massive consequences for linguistic diversity. It is more reasonable to listen and agree with Martin Heidegger that language is "the house of being" because it is in language that we live and move and exist. This valuable and thought-provoking book evaluates the exclusiveness of language in terms of social as well as personal reality. And by recognizing these special features, GF asserts that language is a fact which is intriguingly signalized for us in the term "world," which in its very form seems to suggest precisely that: WOR{L}D (3).

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