



## Linguistics (Teach Yourself)

*Jean Aitchison*

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## Linguistics (Teach Yourself) Jean Aitchison

"Teach Yourself Linguistics" is a straightforward introduction to linguistics, the systematic study that seeks to answer two fundamental questions: "What is language?" and "How does language work?" This book outlines the scope of linguistics, explaining the basic concepts and essential terminology. It discusses sound patterning, syntax, and meaning, as well as the rapidly growing areas of pragmatics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and stylistics. And it explores language and linguistic typology, as well as contemporary uses of language and style in literature, advertising, and newspapers.

## Linguistics (Teach Yourself) Details

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## From Reader Review Linguistics (Teach Yourself) for online ebook

### **Meg Cain says**

Very good primer course for the hobbyist linguist. Helped to provide a good foundation and scope of knowledge that proved a very useful reference in all my future linguistics readings.

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### **Steve says**

Surprisingly readable for such a complex topic. Some seriously funny examples. I think Aitchison spent many hours amusing herself by thinking of cute sentences to demonstrate what academia would love to portray as boring.

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### **Alice says**

I'm off to apply for linguistics programs now

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### **Mark says**

Typical orthodox linguistics intro.

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### **Luther Wilson says**

This books seems to be fulfilling its promise, and I feel I'm getting a good very-high-level overview of this subject, which will prepare me for further reading.

...

At about the 1/2-way point, I can say that it's still well worth it, that I'm getting a (n admittedly high-level) good overview of this subject, from which I can strike out on my own in the future...still recommended!

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### **Vipul Ved Prakash says**

A gem of a book.

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### **Yehya Çalî says**

3.5

**Ibrahem mohamed says**

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**Sowmya says**

Now, this is the first "Intro to Linguistics" book that made me read from beginning to end - without making me feel intimidated with the jargon. Ideal for people without that Linguistic background to get a hang of it, before starting to read an actual Linguistics textbook. It delivers what it promises. Not a bit more. Not a bit less. Like any good introductory book - it left me with N-unanswered questions. :-) Although it might sound weird, I read most of it sitting in trains :-) That just tells how engaging it is, despite the topic.

## Narcissus says

## word formation

## Jonathan Chuang says

Ok, now for one more of my pre-reading rants.

I used not to give two hoots about language, coming as I do from as linguistically impoverished a country as Singapore. Here, the English language is a mangled, cumbersome tool of day-to-day communication. The prevailing attitude of the Singapore peoples is that it is ok to talk about everything using crude approximations, relying on gestures and phrases borrowed from Chinese and Malay to suggest, and I say 'suggest' rather than 'express', what is on one's mind. There used to be, in the past, many more national discussions about the rampant use of 'Singlish' back in the day when the country's founding father, essentially a (final-vestiges-of-the) colonial-era, Cambridge-educated gentleman, was still around. Singlish can be described as somewhat pidgin-esque, though still fundamentally an English construct that has its own simplified though well-understood grammatical rules and unique particles.

For example, instead of the Western (Australian?) colloquial truncation 'hey, what'cha doin', mate?', Singlish has 'eh, what you doing ah?' or even 'eh, you doing what ah?'. Particles like ah, eh, meh, mah, ya, aiyo, aiya, sia seem to originate from rhetorical (what's the appropriate word here...) constructs in Chinese, such as, in this case, '?? ??????', 'wei, ni? zuo ?shen me ?ya?' 'Wei, you? do ?what?, ya?'. There are many other such chimeric grammatical constructions, and other particles involving the Malay *lah* & *leh*, as well as *loh*, which seems to be a hybrid with the Chinese ? 'le'.

Civil society as imagined in the western sense of democratic institutions and rights still doesn't really exist in Singapore, except in an adolescent sort of way, given that that is the primary demographic of its enthusiasts. However, Chinese civil society continues to play a strong, though waning dominance over the way Chinese Singaporeans conduct their lives. As far as I can tell, it is very rare to find a Singaporean Chinese person who is as much cognizant of Western as they are Chinese culture, or vice versa. The new guard has left the old guard behind, with an increasingly great rift between those who accept the fundamental tenets of liberalism, and those to whom society is an artifact within which one is rather trapped. This is a pity, since Chinese culture is so fundamentally different in the way it imagines the individual and one's way of life. The exception is probably a small class of well-to-do, highly-educated families, very much in keeping with the manner of Lee Kuan Yew and his stock, who are able to look beyond the limits of their own culture and its fads and fetishes. Some of them lose their measured understanding of the world for rabid liberalism. Nevertheless, this sector of what I would call sane progressive society in Singapore is rather small.

My point about all this is that the shallowness in a country's literary and civil consciousness leads to a shallowness in their language, and vice versa. It really does show when interviews are conducted offhand on the streets. In Europe (maybe not America) people come off as rather intelligent and thoughtful all round, very much in vogue with their country's and Europe's national or regional consciousness. In Thailand, Japan or the Middle East, people express themselves with great fluency and intelligence in their native languages. In Singapore however, one is likely to be treated to a garbled mess of halting 'Singlish' and muddled thoughts, plus a distinctive Southeast-Asian small-mindedness. These things show that contrary to what Singapore's consistent performance in various worldwide educational benchmarks might suggest, Singaporeans are not at all 'well-educated'. To take as a counter-example, consider Hong Kong students, many of whom are eloquent in Mandarin, English (both of which are learnt in the classroom) as well as their native Cantonese.

This is not to say Singaporeans are not intelligent: they are, and have their wits about them in most areas of life. Rather, what Singaporeans seem unable to do is to take questions of larger importance seriously. On the one hand there seems to be something pleasant about this down to earth attitude, but if only one would observe more carefully, it seems rather a case of a willful ignorance towards matters of societal and moral importance. In choosing to acquiesce to the heavy hand of the government in exchange for personal (and moral) comfort, it seems the 'social contract' in our case is really a deal with the devil...

To my mind, Singapore's educational failings is an excellent case-study in the dangers of 'social engineering' a national language, as Lee Kuan Yew did in the 70s and 80s. Everyone wants to clamour on board (the English bandwagon) but no one does it particularly well. It also attests to the true difficulty of forging a national identity among peoples of distinct ethnic and cultural backgrounds. By contrast, Hong Kong doesn't have the racial and linguistic diversity that we do, and one has to conclude that something down here went wrong that down there went right, not just in language education, but education in general. One could never, for example, expect there to be a mass demonstration akin to Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement right here in Singapore, given our government's continuing tacit suppression of civil liberties and the ubiquitous lack of a spirit of independent judgement among citizens. Even the recent election day stirrings in my country have been less to do with a country awakening into a new political awareness than the grumblings of a dissatisfied and ungrateful ken. By contrast, there seems to be a strong consensus among the young people of Hong Kong that if they want their freedom, they are going to have to fight for it, even though from what I can tell, there exists in Hong Kong the same rampant authoritarianism as there does in China, thanks to mainland pressure.

These are just impressions though, based in casual observations and unreliable memory. A serious linguistic study of Singapore, its mother tongues, Singlish, its educational programmes, ethnicity and 'culture', as well

as class and socio-economic status, together with more detailed comparisons with Hong Kong's educational programme should prove more interesting and insightful than these offhand remarks. Plus, I have been long out of touch with the mainland Chinese students of my high school (all of whom enjoyed education and civil life in my country but who, unlike me, have not been conscripted to act, for the duration of two years, as cheap manpower for the country's national security programme). Well, my point is that I can't give an all too accurate account of mainland Chinese.

The introduction in this book attempts to paint the linguist as a value-neutral scientist. The use of language, he states rightly, isn't bound to absolute or unchanging standards of 'correctness'. Yet there are standards which linguists should be inspired to uphold, for the tremendous capacity for language to express human thoughts and shape human minds can be diminished by incorrect and lackadaisical use. Demanding that language is both precise and expressive can lead, I strongly believe, to the improvement of mind.

As children we knew of things neither their conceptual distinctions nor their words. Positing the words first can force the mind to search for and label meaningful distinctions in our perceptions of reality. Language is above all a heritage, a conceptual and symbolic programme guided by usefulness, and it accumulates wisdom over the many years of its development. The deterioration of language, and language use in society, is the deterioration of thought, and the thoughts of society.

Back to track, there seems to be definitive, if sometimes irregular structure to every language, both a regular grammar and a regularity in lexicon, which was, really, what I had originally wanted to write about...

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### **cassie says**

I passed my CSET because of this book!

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### **Abeer Hoque says**

This compact DIY book goes through a broad introduction of the field of linguistics including basic terminology, concepts, and different branches such as sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and the one I found most interesting (for obvious reasons): stylistics, which is the linguistic analysis of literary language.

Chomsky's various linguistic theories over the years are outlined and it's clear we haven't found a unifying grammar to describe English, let alone all languages. This last is Chomsky's goal, and he's lately put forth the vaguely disturbing theory that children are born with an 'innate' framework of linguistics and then switch on/off different parameters as culture and experience dictate.

I found it about half of the book to be extremely readable and accessible, and the other half suddenly dense and technical. Something in between might have been better, but as a first look for a lay person, it was quite good.

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### **Jan-Maat says**

I recall there were a few chapters on Chomsky in this book and I imagine that's been revised in subsequent

editions as some of his ideas have fallen out of favour as research progresses, and we have more knowledge about the degree of diversity in human language.

My take away from this book was the idea of pragmatics - that by being able to understand language pragmatically rather than literally we are able to hear phrases like 'sunbathing' without having to panic or be disturbed, so long as everybody has a shared set of references.

On reflection this doesn't seem like much to have learnt from two hundred pages of book, too bad I can't go sun bathing to make up for this.

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### **Kelly says**

Good overall review of the basics of linguistics and its branches of study. This will be a good jumping off point into a few different areas.

I did love that in the reading I have been doing over the last month, this is the THIRD time I have come across the quote below : (now I REALLY have to read the original text of alice in wonderland)

'When \*I\* use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean -- neither more nor less'

-Lewis Carroll

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