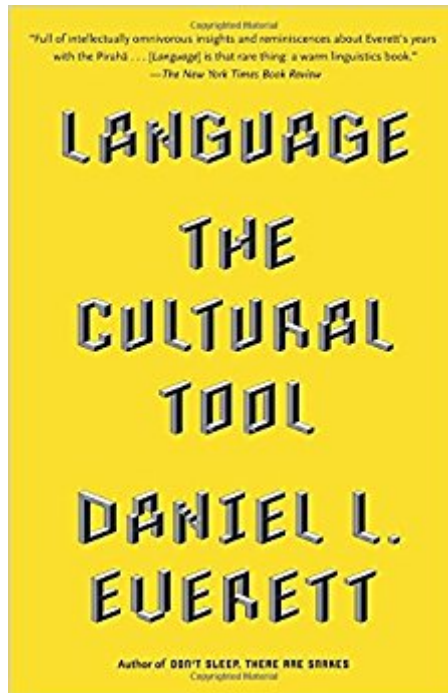




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Language: The Cultural Tool



Synopsis

“The most important and provocative anthropological fieldwork ever undertaken.”
Tom Wolfe
For years, the prevailing opinion among academics has been that language is embedded in our genes, existing as an innate and instinctual part of us. In this bold and provocative study, linguist Daniel Everett argues that, like other tools, language was invented by humans and can be reinvented or lost. He shows how the evolution of different language forms—that is, different grammar—reflects how language is influenced by human societies and experiences, and how it expresses their great variety. Combining anthropology, primatology, computer science, philosophy, linguistics, psychology, and his own pioneering research with the *Pirahã*, and using insights from many different languages and cultures, Everett presents an unprecedented elucidation of this society-defined nature of language. In doing so, he also gives us a new understanding of how we think and who we are.

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Customer Reviews

“Full of intellectually omnivorous insights and reminiscences about Everett’s years with the *Pirahã*. . . [Language] is that rare thing: a warm linguistics book.”
The New York Times Book Review
“The most important and provocative anthropological fieldwork ever undertaken.”
Tom Wolfe
“Revelatory. There is nothing about humans that is quite as astonishing as language.”
The Guardian
“A book whose importance is almost

impossible to overstate. This is an intellectual cri de coeur and a profound celebration of human diversity. . . . Very rich but also very readable. •The Sunday Times (London) “[Language] is that rare thing: a warm linguistics book . . . A useful study of a burgeoning theory compatible with Darwinism, anthropology, psychology and philosophy •an interdisciplinary orientation the Chomskyans have largely spurned. •The New York Times Book Review “[Language] deserves a serious reading. •The Economist “Readers’ eyes will . . . sparkle with new insight. •Kirkus Reviews “Everett’s stories of the Pirahã . . . bring to life the culture that fosters the language. The stories also anchor his linguistic proposals in anthropology. Most linguists might take this as an insult; Everett would accept it as a compliment. •The Globe and Mail (Canada) “[Everett lobs] a scientific grenade . . . into the spot where anthropology, linguistics and psychology meet: he asserts that the Piraha language exhibits traits that call into question aspects of linguistic theories that have been widely accepted for decades. •Chicago Tribune “Everett writes simply and persuasively about language. . . . His courage and conviction should give linguists pause for thought. •The Observer (London)

Daniel L. Everett is dean of arts and sciences at Bentley University. He has held appointments in linguistics and/or anthropology at the University of Campinas, the University of Pittsburgh, the University of Manchester, and Illinois State University. www.daneverettbooks.com

Everett’s book, recommended to me by a MacArthur winner whose brain I was luckily in a position to pick, has helped me sort out a question that has been on my mind ever since Noam Chomsky first gave me a fishy feeling many years ago. When science has not (or not yet) reached the point of being able to provide individual features of language with detailed brain localizations that they do not also share with other, non-language faculties, the Chomskyan notion that we are all born with a species-wide “deep structure” that enables every healthy baby to “master” any native language must be entertained with some skepticism. For openers, apropos of “mastery,” it should be obvious that not every native speaker of English who survives childhood has become a Shakespeare. Everett thinks that hominid cultures, already diverse, evolved a need for language before pharynxes lengthened, mouths shortened, and brains grew to permit hums and grunts to gain extra usefulness and become uniquely and differently articulated individual languages. Trained as a field linguist, Everett insists that whatever obscure and general similarities philosophy may find among our

languages, it is the myriad differences between them that must be obvious to common sense. In addition to his expertise, Everett is a colloquial "good read" who can make you laugh out loud. This is a very important book about what makes us human.

One important book for me. The author not only knows his stuff, he knows how to get his point across in an engaging and entertaining way. My suggestion is to read his earlier work "Don't Sleep, There Are Snakes: Life and Language in the Iain Jungle" I did and found I had an easier time following along with his examples. I can't heap enough praise on this guy. And no we're not pals or connected in any fashion other than we share the planet. Check out his latest book. He will change your thinking...about your thinking.

Most interesting book, delivered promptly at a fair price.

Daniel Everett returns to the theme he raised in his previous *Don't sleep, there are Snakes* about his experience working with the Parahã language, the Iain population he worked with while doing missionary work as an SIL worker. In his previous book, he argues that the population he worked with exhibit a language devoid of many of the parameters of most of the world's language. If indeed Dr. Everett has done his analysis well, and there's little to suggest otherwise, we can all agree that the Parahã have a remarkable "stripped down to the basics" language. However, when Dr. Everett tries to build his case against the existence of universal Grammar (UG) as set forth by Noam Chomsky and offer the standard "cognitive" model eschewing not only an innate language function but the modules from which these structures arise, he steps into a world in which reveals some serious misunderstanding. He builds on a shaky sense of what "culture" is, misuses the notions of Peirce and De Saussure and reveals a very loose grasp of both natural selection and its cultural counterpart. The result is that comes up with the same old tired model of children acquiring language through "usage" as do Tomasello, Taylor and others of the cognitive school. So, no surprise here. More old wine in a shiny new bottle. Dr. Everett has put a lot of effort into this work which, alas, falls short because he never successfully tells us what technology is and how it's integrated with language as part of a general theory of mind. He would do well to not regale us with amusing and interesting stories about the several scholars he quotes and reread what they had to say. He's unfamiliar with Chomsky and Berwick's clearest statement to date on UG and would do well to read Eric Lenneberg's 1973 *Biological Foundations of Language* and SJ Gould on cultural evolution. He's a bright guy who likely knows more about Iain Native American languages than

anyone around today, but this work falls short of being more than an entertaining read.

I read this book after reading Daniel L. Everett book "Don't sleep there are sneaks" about his experience with the Pirãfã as on the Amazona Jungle. On that book an on this onw more enforcebly he points out that culture enforces the language of every community. It's a great thesis about how reality is build by the culture or by the language, better, by the knotty relation between those two concepts, languagem and culture.If you are interested in that matter you should read it!! hope you enjoy

I really enjoyed "Dont sleep there are snakes" by Daniel Everett. This book is less informative and entertaining. It has it's moments, but a substantial part was too caught up in the universal language debate. I realize that this book is in fact to large extent about this debate. The problem was more that the lines of reasoning generally too long and too shallow. In this debate I am on the Everett side, so this is not driven by differing views. A good thing, if you survive the rhetorics the first few chapters, the books get better.

The book lays out a well reasoned argument against Chomsky's nativist universal grammars based on the authors extensive study of the languages of primitive populations in South America. The book explores the claims of anatomical features of the brain that would have "housed" a language organ. It discusses the linguistic features that are claimed to be universal, but in fact are shown to be missing in some of the languages studied by the author. The book written to a more general audience and is a pleasant read.

was very satisfied with the seller and the product.

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