



BOOK REVIEW

A Review of Thinking like a Linguist: An Introduction to the Science of Language

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Sandoval, Jordan B., and Kristin E. Denham. *Thinking like a Linguist: An Introduction to the Science of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

Jordan B. Sandoval and Kristin E. Denham's *Thinking like a Linguist: An Introduction to the Science of Language* (Cambridge University Press, 2021) is a clear, lab-style workbook on how linguists do analysis. It is written for undergraduates, as it emphasizes the basics of the scientific method, hands-on problem solving, and stepping through real data rather than surveying every subdomain at arm's length. The book's preface is explicit about this aim: the authors want students to "think like a scientist about language" and to practice the methodology of analysis, not to just memorize new terminology.

The organization of the book reflects that aim. After an orientation to the nature of language, the three central chapters of the book tackle the "sounds," "structure," and "meaning" of language, combining the subdomains of phonetics/phonology, morphology/syntax, and semantics/pragmatics, respectively. A final chapter shows how these different layers interact (i.e., morphophonology, intonation, structure-meaning interfaces) and introduces helpful analytical tools. Each chapter is filled with "Let's Practice," "More to Discover," and "More to Consider" sections that push budding linguists to analyze data and argue from evidence.

As a teaching text, the book shines in its pacing and balance. The fundamentals of Linguistics are given, such as the IPA, phonological contrast, constituency, and compositionality. Each of these topics is introduced with enough theory to empower analysis, and then they are quickly grounded in the following exercises. The concluding chapter also grounds the reader in the importance of "science and formalism," giving new linguists a realistic picture of what counts as a good explanation in Linguistics and why formal notations can be a help, rather than a hinderance. This CUP book overview of Linguistics continually reinforces their methodological aim: step-by-step instructions on interpreting data are its main selling point, and there are additional instructor resources online (cf. [Cambridge University Press](https://www.cambridge.org/9781108839261)).

So, where does Cognitive Linguistics enter the picture? The most direct point of contact is in the semantics chapter, when the authors contrast feature theory and prototype theory, along with their treatment of lexical categories, commonsense meanings, and non-compositionality, topics where Cognitive approaches (e.g., category prototypes, radial networks, usage-based meaning) are often central. There are also a few “Spotlight” boxes in psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics that invite discussions about cognitive processing, categorization, and language use. With that said, the book is not written from a Cognitive Linguistics perspective: there are no dedicated sections on conceptual metaphor, image schemas, cognitive or construction grammar, or even embodied cognition. Rather, the book is thoroughly methods-oriented in its aim: the reader finds Cognitive notions where they help to clarify analysis, but the authors avoid adopting any particular theoretical school for their presentation.

For instructors or readers hoping for a stronger introduction to Cognitive Linguistics, (including this reader!), the book provides a broad overview to Linguistics rather than a narrow focus from any one theoretical approach. The book equips students with the analytical habits that transfer well to Cognitive frameworks (i.e., arguing from data, weighing alternative analyses, formalizing generalizations). In brief, *Thinking like a Linguist* is a very effective “how to do linguistics” workbook, with a few helpful points of contact with Cognitive Linguistics (i.e., sufficient for an introduction to Linguistics, but noticeably neutral so that learners can explore other approaches more deeply in subsequent courses).

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