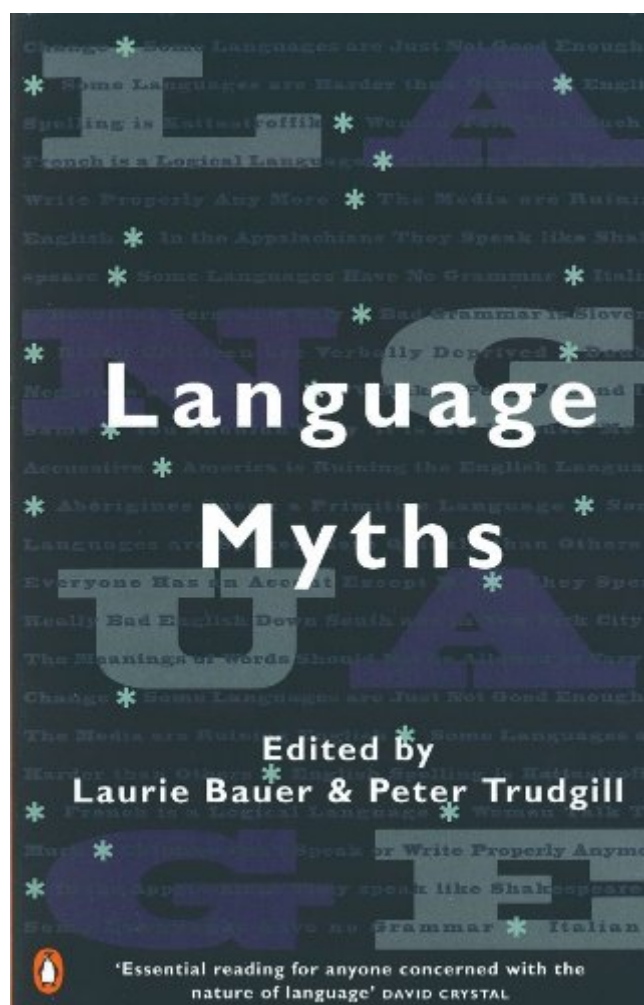


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Language Myths



Synopsis

A unique collection of original essays by 21 of the world's leading linguists. The topics discussed focus on some of the most popular myths about language: The Media Are Ruining English; Children Can't Speak or Write Properly Anymore; America is Ruining the English Language. The tone is lively and entertaining throughout and there are cartoons from Doonesbury and The Wizard of Id to illustrate some of the points. The book should have a wide readership not only amongst students who want to read leading linguists writing about popular misconceptions but also amongst the large number of people who enjoy reading about language in general.

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Customer Reviews

I got my degree in Linguistics and this was one of the books for my classes. For some particular reason I kept it and decided to read it again today. Everyone loves a good myth, and just as much people generally enjoy debunking a myth as well. That is what this book sets out to do for language. It is comprised of several chapters, each having their title state what it is that will be discussed and

written by several different authors. The Meaning of Words Should Not Be Allowed to Vary or Change by Peter Trudgill He takes the time to explain how languages naturally change and with them, their words change meaning as well. There is nothing wrong with this and it is a development that should not be feared. He gives several examples in this chapter as well. Some Languages are Just Not Good Enough by Ray Harlow This chapter takes the time to discuss people's notions that some languages are just not sufficient for the modern world. It also explores the concept of countries with several languages using one prominent language in place of all others for ease of communication. The Media Are Ruining English by Jean Aitchison This chapter explores the effects media have on speakers of English and how stylistically English is expressed through media. French is a Logical Language by Anthony Lodge Lodge attempts to explain how there isn't really a "logical" language in the sense that rules tend to change for different things and one base set can never be applied to any one language. English Spelling is Kattastroffik by Edward Carney Like it sounds, this chapter covers the different rules of English spelling and how at times they do not seem logical.

I found this book to be a great disappointment. Don't get me wrong - there's nothing I find healthier than a little myth-debunking. So I was predisposed to like this collection of 21 essays, edited by Bauer and Trudgill. Each chapter takes a particular 'language myth' and then argues against the validity of the myth, some more convincingly than others. (Having tried to learn both Russian and Spanish as foreign languages, I think it's fair to say that the statement "Some languages are harder than others" is not a myth). The quality of the contributions is somewhat variable, though most are quite readable. This accessibility to readers who may not necessarily have any formal exposure to linguistics is the book's main strength, in my view. The reason for my disappointment is that, for almost half the chapters, I found the stated myth to be a straw man, which made those chapters not particularly interesting to read. There were two common problems - in some cases, the wording of the myth was so non-specific as to be meaningless, another common flaw was that the myth was worded in a very extreme fashion, essentially presenting a straw man for the author to demolish. For instance, myth 1 "The meanings of words should not be allowed to vary or change" is couched in such absolute terms that anyone expressing even slight disagreement is automatically made to seem unreasonable. Or take the example "bad grammar is slovenly". The author appears to interpret "bad" grammar to mean anything that deviates, even slightly, from some highly codified set of rules.

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