Maya Honda & Wayne O'Neil. (2008). *Thinking linguistically: A scientific approach to language.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing. 253pp.

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Thinking Linguistically: A Scientific Approach to Language written by authors Maya Honda and Wayne O'Neil represents a labor of love, twenty years in the making. The structure of this volume is set up like a textbook intended for students and instructors studying and teaching introductory linguistics and first and second language acquisition. The authors conclude every chapter with a list of the principal concepts covered, along with suggestions for further readings. The use of parse trees throughout the book visually reinforces the structure of the examples given. It is hoped that readers, while working collectively through problem sets, come to a better understanding of the basic theoretical issues behind linguistics, while drawing accurate conclusions from proposed hypotheses. The book contains 253 pages and is broken down into four parts containing 17 chapters in all.

The seven chapters in part I explore the structural complexity and acquisition of the phenomenon of plural noun formation in English, Spanish, Brazilian Portuguese, Nicaraguan English, Mandarin Chinese, and Cherokee. This is done by looking at various cross-linguistic interactions: Morphology-Phonology Interaction, Semantic-Morphology-Phonology Interaction, and Morphology-Syntax Interaction. By examining what seems to be such a basic structure in language–noun pluralization, the authors emphasize the fact that this construct is far from being simple for second language learners. The nine problem sets cleverly place the reader in the position of a foreign language learner who, in order to figure out the system of pluralization in other languages, must go through the steps of identifying patterns, formulating, and testing hypotheses.

In part II, comprising five chapters, the authors focus on basic syntactic processes, probing the phenomenon of question formation. They begin with an overview of the basic underlying syntactic structures of sentences and phrases that result from the merging of words, roots, and morphemes. Following this, in their inquiry into question formation, the authors limit their focus to WH-Questions and Yes/No Questions. Here one learns of the magnetism of question particles on the syntactic structure of questions. Similar to part I, the reader is brought through seven problem sets that address cross-linguistic similarities and differences by looking at how questions are formed in Mandarin Chinese, English, Brazilian Portuguese, and Tohono O'odham. In this section, there seems to be a heightened sensitivity to the complexities a second language learner may face in regard to different question particles and WH-words, but the authors indicate that, according to Universal Grammar Theory, question particles and WH-questions do exist in all languages.

In part III of this volume, composed of only two chapters, the authors investigate the phonology and the acquisition of syntactic constraints on contraction in English. Here, the authors focus on the particularity of English grammar rather than on more universal phenomena, yet speculate that it must somehow follow from Universal Grammar. Two problem sets allow the reader to hypothesize on the syntax of the Wanna-Contraction and the Is-Contraction.

In chapters 15 through 18 of part IV of this book, the authors investigate how the meaning of a sentence is derived from syntactic and semantic rules. They first take a look at how predications, expressions of number, and the definiteness of a sentence encompass its meaning. Then, by considering pluralization in Kiowa, a native-American language, they illustrate further the concept of compositionality of meaning. They finish by examining the roles that noun phrases and prepositional phrases play in the argument structure of a sentence. Two problem sets in this section allow for further consolidation of the main concepts.

This book would serve as an excellent textbook for undergraduate or graduate students studying linguistics or first and second language acquisition, though a basic knowledge of linguistics would be prerequisite. *Thinking Linguistically* is a well-referenced and clearly written introduction to the nature of linguistic analysis, drawing for the most part on Chomskyan perspectives of Universal Grammar (Chomsky, 1957, 2004). In addition, the many years of teaching experience the two authors bring to it are manifest through the engaging problem sets they propose. Moreover, the examples given in the twenty problem sets from a variety of languages inspire readers to work them out and thereby be pushed to truly think linguistically. Also, readers are encouraged to further develop their knowledge of the subject through a list of additional reading references found at the end of every chapter.

Throughout the book, the authors remind the reader that parsimony prevails when it comes to language. In other words, we tend to be efficient when it comes to storing knowledge and information about language. This equally applies to the formulation of hypotheses about language: that is, make it simple. Yet, by focusing on and analyzing only two linguistic phenomena—noun phrase plurality and question formation—one is left with a question: why these two and not another? Nonetheless, this volume clearly belongs on the shelves of graduate students interested in linguistics and language acquisition.

References:

Chomsky, Noam. (1957). *Syntactic Structures*. The Hague: Mouton.
Chomsky, Noam. (2004). *The Generative Enterprise Revisited*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.