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Book Review

Programming Language Pragmatics

by Michael Scott

Highly Recommended

ISBN: 1 55860 578 9 Publisher: Morgan Kaufmann

Pages: 851pp Price: £32-95

Categories: [languages](#)

Reviewed by [Francis Glassborow](#) in [C Vu 12-1 \(Jan 2000\)](#)

Let me say straight out that I thoroughly enjoyed this book. The author writes with more fluency than many of his academic colleagues. An added bonus is that he understands that different languages have individual strengths and weaknesses. He avoids inane comparisons so often made by writers who do not understand the difference between a language such as C++ with a large degree of static binding and ones such as Smalltalk with entirely dynamic binding.

It is very difficult to summarise such a substantial and comprehensive book in the space that I allow myself. The author has a wide-ranging knowledge of computer languages and draws on more than forty languages during the course of the book. If you are the kind of person who is tempted to suggest new features for your language of choice, reading this book may make you more thoughtful. On the other hand you may find material to strengthen your criticism of what you consider to be weaknesses in the language you are being compelled (by your employer) to use.

If you really have no influence (or, like to many, do not care) on the choice of computer language you use then you may prefer to remain ignorant by not reading this book but the rest will find that it opens their eyes to the wide potential that choice opens up.

One problem with too many University Computer Science/Engineering degrees is the very limited exposure students have to computing languages. Many courses are now being designed round a single language and graduates leave their university with a very narrow and often highly biased view of programming. Academics often promote what they believe to be 'good' for you. Look at the 1980's with Pascal being taught CS courses while the commercial world was often using C (that is not intended to be critical of either language).

What we need is an educated workforce that understands the forces that drive different languages and so can use them more effectively. If you are a student (particularly if your course only covers one or two languages) make an effort to read this book (actually the book is easy to read, but student finances may make it hard to get a copy) because it will provide insights that most courses will fail to provide.

If you have passed your student days, try to make time to read this book because I think it will deepen your understanding and help you to see why both language and methodology wars are such sterile pursuits. When you understand the range of choice you will be better able to make decisions. You will understand why writing Smalltalk in C++ does both languages a disservice.

If you get the opportunity, read the back cover in your local bookshop. For once I think the promises made are largely fulfilled.

This is one book that I wish I had had the experience and breadth of knowledge to have written myself.

Other Authors with the same surname

Scott

[Programming Illustrated](#) by [D F Scott](#) [[Recommended](#)]

(Reviewed Sep 1994)

[UML Explained](#) by [Kendall Scott](#) [[Recommended](#)] (Reviewed Jun 2001)

[Unified Process Explained, The](#) by [Kendall Scott](#) (Reviewed Dec 2002)

[Virtual Private Networks](#) by [Charlie Scott](#) [[Recommended](#)]
(Reviewed Mar 2000)

[Virtual Private Networks](#) by [Mike Erwin & Charlie Scott & Paul Wolfe](#) [[Recommended](#)] (Reviewed May 2000)

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