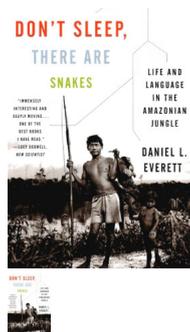


Don't Sleep, There Are Snakes: Life and Language in the Amazonia



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Description

A riveting account of the astonishing experiences and discoveries made by linguist Daniel Everett while he lived with the Pirahã, a small tribe of Amazonian Indians in central Brazil. Daniel Everett arrived among the Pirahã with his wife and three young children hoping to convert the tribe to Christianity. Everett quickly became obsessed with their language and its cultural and linguistic implications. The Pirahã have no counting system, no fixed terms for color, no concept of war, and no personal property. Everett was so impressed with their peaceful way of life that he eventually lost faith in the God he'd hoped to introduce to them, and instead devoted his life to the science of linguistics. Part passionate memoir, part scientific exploration, Everett's life-changing tale is riveting look into the nature of language, thought, and life itself.

Reviews

Sunday, 18 December 2011

This book was a fascinating look at a tribe who's language has no vocabulary or roots with any other known language. The Piraha have no concept of numbers, colors, possessions or war. They live entirely in the present. Everett challenges Noam Chomsky's theory of universal grammar by pointing out that the Pirahã language has no recursion discounting the idea of a grammar gene, meaning that there is no universal grammar. Over a 30 year period Everett who's mission was a translation of the Bible into Piraha starts to question his own values, beliefs and faith. A short excerpt from the book; The Pirahãs say different things when they leave my hut at night on their way to bed. Sometimes they just say, "I'm going." But frequently they use an expression that, though surprising at first,

has come to be one of my favorite ways of saying good night: "Don't sleep, there are snakes." The Pirahãs say this for two reasons. First, they believe that by sleeping less they can "harden themselves," a value they all share. Second, they know that danger is all around them in the jungle and that sleeping soundly can leave one defenseless from attack by any of the numerous predators around the village. The Pirahãs laugh and talk a good part of the night. They don't sleep much at one time. Rarely have I heard the village completely quiet at night or noticed someone sleeping for several hours straight. I have learned so much from the Pirahãs over the years. But this is perhaps my favorite lesson. Sure, life is hard and there is plenty of danger. And it might make us lose some sleep from time to time. But enjoy it. Life goes on. I read this as if it was my favorite meal savoring each page and would definitely go back for seconds.

Robert Hogan