



21 世纪精品规划教材系列

# 英语词汇学教程

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# LEXICOLOGY

主编◎黄天琪 张颖

 吉林大学出版社

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# 英语词汇学教程

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# 前 言

英语词汇学是语言学的一个重要分支,其研究对象主要是词汇。词汇是语言的一种基本材料,脱离词汇,言语活动就无法顺利进行。英语词汇学是一门以当代语言理论为指导,重在揭示现代英语词汇的普遍规律,分析英语词汇各种现象以及英语词汇的演变和发展,深入研究英语词汇的专业课程。了解词汇学的基本理论和词汇的构词有助于帮助学习者了解英语的词汇特征,扩大英语词汇量,提高正确使用英语词汇的能力。

本书系统阐述了英语词汇学的基本概念,包括英语词汇的形成、发展、结构、涵义,并且详细介绍了英语习语、英语辞典和词汇学习等方面的知识。本书既有理论指导,也有实例分析,目的是通过英语词汇学研究,使学习者建立起系统而全面的整体概念。本书使用英语撰写,语言浅显易懂,适用于英语专业学生及英语爱好者使用,实用性较强。书中每一章均附有练习题,便于学生掌握所学的知识,并应用所学知识分析具体的词汇现象,从而培养学生分析问题和解决问题的能力。

本书编写工作具体分工如下:黄天琪负责设计全书的编写理念、写作思路、单元样本,并编写了第二、五、六章;张颖负责全书的统稿、修订工作,并编写第一、八章;王华梅编写了第三、四章及附录部分;赵旭编写了第七、九、十章。

在本书的编写过程中参考了大量国内外著作、文献及丰富的网络资源,在此谨对有关作者表示谢忱!

限于我们的水平,错误和疏漏之处在所难免,敬请广大读者批评指正。

编者  
2015年5月



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 **Chapter 1 Introduction** **1.1 Words****1.1.1 Definition of a Word**

What is a word? The definition of a word engaged the attention of philosophers and linguists for ages. Although numerous definitions have been suggested, none of them seem to be perfect. Experts and linguists still do not agree on all aspects of the word. Therefore, it is rather difficult to give the definition of the word. Many people tend to think of the word in visual terms, that is, as a meaningful group of letters printed or written down in a piece of paper. Such a casual conception, of course, is little more than a reflection of the millions of words which appear on pages of text books, journals, newspapers, magazines, and novels. Linguists have traditionally depended on the written word as primary source material for defining the essential meanings of words.

Some linguists regard the study of spoken word as more important than the study of the written. Children learn to master the sounds of a language, its basic grammatical structure and an elementary vocabulary, long before they learn to write. Historically, the spoken word comes first. The earliest evidence of writing dates back about several thousand years. According to the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, a word can be defined as “the smallest significant unit of speech”—a definition traditionally accepted for centuries. But modern linguists have maintained that the smallest meaningful unit of speech is not a word, but a morpheme. A word may consist of one or more than one morpheme, e. g. unemployment, which contains three morphemes (un-, -employ-, -ment).

The American linguist L. Bloomfield defines a word as “a minimum free form” in his *Language* published in 1933. He distinguishes between two types of linguistic forms: free forms and bound forms. A free form is one which can occur as a separate word while a bound form is one which cannot exist on its own as a separate word. Take



unemployment for example. It contains a free form or morpheme employ and two bound forms or morphemes un-and-ment. The former(employ)can be used independently as a word while that latter(un-and-ment)cannot appear in isolation, but must be attached to the free form or morpheme employ.

The French linguist A. Meillet gives his definition as follows: "A word is defined by the association of a given meaning, with a given group of sounds susceptible of a given grammatical employment." (Lin Fumei 1985:16-17) This definition shows a unity of meaning and sound with special emphasis on the word function in the grammatical structure.

To sum up, the definition of a word will cover the following points:

- (1) a minimal free form of a language;
- (2) a sound unity;
- (3) a unit of meaning;
- (4) a form that can function alone in a sentence.

Therefore, we can say that " a word is a minimal free form of a language that has a given sound, meaning and syntactic function. "

Words can be simple and complicated, yet all must comply with these criteria. Man and fine are simple, but they each have sound, meaning and syntactic function, and each can be used alone in a sentence. Naturally they are words. There are words which are morphologically complex such as mis, for, tune and man, age, ment. Both are polysyllabic words and can be used as "subject", "object" and "predictive". Though misfortune can be divided as mis-and mortune, the former cannot stand alone as a word.

There are generally two approaches to the study of words, namely synchronic and diachronic. From a synchronic point of view, words can be studied at a point in time, disregarding whatever changes have taken place. If we take a diachronic perspective, we will consider the word historically, looking into its origin and changes in form and meaning.

### 1.1.2 Major Features of Words

Apparently, words play an important role in our verbal communication. To facilitate our understanding of the concept of word, some scholars (Logwig and Barret, 1967; Jackson and Amvela, 2000) have tried to generalize the major features of words.

1. A word is a sound or combination of sounds which we make voluntarily with our vocal equipment. In English, when linguists symbolize these sounds in writing, they use a special phonemic alphabet that has a different symbol for each phoneme.

In addition to phonemes, there are three other sound characteristics: stress, pitch,





and juncture. Stress has to do with the degree of loudness, or accent, which is given to certain words or parts of words. Pitch refers to voice tones, which may range from high to low in a typical utterance. Juncture has to do with the pauses between speech sounds and at the end of utterances and also with the things that happen to the voice tones at those times. For example, the meaning of the following sentences, when spoken aloud, can be identified with the help of these characteristics:

I want some whitewall paint. (paint for my tires)

I want some white wall paint. (paint for my living room)

In writing, the space or lack of it between white and wall helps us understand what is intended. In speech, our use of stress, pitch, and juncture does the job.

2. A word is symbolic and is used to stand for something else. In each language, sounds are used to represent objects, happenings, or ideas. There is no logical relationship between the sound which stands for a thing or idea and the actual thing or idea itself. It is only a symbolic connection, and the word for a bull might just as reasonably be *lub* or *ulb* if we all agree that it should be.

Words can symbolize something right before our eyes in the immediate here and now. They can also symbolize something not present, not seen, and not in immediate experience. They allow us to talk about something which now exists only in our mind, something which has happened in the past, or something which may happen in the future.

3. The word is uninterruptible unit. When elements are added to a word to modify its meaning, they never interrupt the internal stability of the word. For example, the prefix *-im* and the suffix *-able* may be added to the words *possible* and *drink* and give *impossible* and *drinkable* respectively.

4. A word has to do with its social function. It helps human beings interact culturally with one another—which is another way of saying “communicate”. Words do much more than promote the exchange of information and ideas. As members of society we need words for all our life activities; to show affection, anger, pleasure, fear, and all the other emotions; to persuade others; to make a living; to change our institutions; to uphold law and order; to build dams; to make friends—in short, to operate normally in terms of our own culture. Without words there could be no culture; they are the glue that holds a society together.

Words help us fulfill the social need of talking together. Often the fact that we are saying something is more important than what we say. When we meet, we say “How do you do?” without really expecting a physical report, we say “It’s a nice day” without wishing really to engage in a discussion about weather. These customary polite exchan-



ges are a kind of indirect communication. They say in effect, "I'm being friendly. I anticipate that you will be the same." Thus, words are part of the face we wear when we meet the world.

5. A word may consist of one or more morphemes. When it consists of one morpheme only, it cannot be broken down into smaller meaningful units, e. g. dog, hand, man, out, work. These are called "simple" words, which are typically "minimum free forms", in the sense that they may stand by themselves and yet act as minimally complete utterances, e. g. in answer to a question.

6. Words are part of the large communication system we call language. A word is partly dependent for meaning upon its use in that larger context. To know a word, we are to recognize its sound in the stream of speech, the accumulated experiences with which the sound is associated, and its function in a sentence or utterance as it works grammatically with other words.

7. A word occurs typically in the structure of phrases. In the typical way, morphemes are used to build words, words to build phrases, phrases to build clauses, and clauses to build sentences.

The instant recognition of the meanings of words is a bit complex, as we must consider the context of each word in its sentence or utterance. For instance, the word bull may suggest any one of a number of things, depending upon one's own personal experience of the various meanings the word has previously acquired—the papal bull that is signed by a Pope, the Bull that chased Paul Newman in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, the prize fighter in the ring "bulling" his opponent into the ropes, or even the interjection one may snort when told something obviously untrue. In other words, the word bull needs other words with it to give it context and pin its meaning down.

### 1.1.3 Classification of Words

The English vocabulary consists of words of all kinds. They can be classified by different criteria and for different purposes. Words may fall into the basic word stock and non-basic vocabulary by use frequency into content words and functional words by notion, and into native words and borrowed words by origin.

#### 1. Basic Word Stock and Non-basic Vocabulary

The basic word stock is the foundation of the vocabulary accumulated over centuries and forms the common core of the language. Though words of the basic word stock constitute a small percentage of the English vocabulary, they are nonetheless the most important part of it. These words have distinct characteristics.

(1) All national character. Words of the basic word stock denote the most common



things and phenomena of the world around us, which are indispensable to all the people who speak the language. They include words relating to categories, e. g.

Natural phenomena: rain, snow, fire, water, sun, moon, spring, summer, wind, hill;

Human body and relations: head, foot, hand, face, father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter;

Names of plants and animals: oak, pine, grass, pear, apple, tree, horse, cow, sheep, cat, dog, chicken;

Action, size, domain, state: come, go, eat, hear, beat, carry, good, evil, old, young, hot, cold, heavy, white, black;

Numerals, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions: one, ten, hundred, I, you, your, who, in, out, under, and, but, till, as.

Any speaker of English, irrespective of class origin, education, profession, geographical regions, and culture, etc., cannot avoid using these words.

(2) Stability. Words of the basic word stock have been in use for centuries, e. g. man, fire, mountain, water, sun, moon. As they denote the most common things necessary to life, they are likely to remain unchanged. Stability, however, is only relative as the basic word stock has been undergoing some changes. Words like arrow, bow, chariot and knight have now moved out of the word stock whereas such words as electricity, machine, car, plane, computer, radio, television, which denote new things in today's modern way of life, have entered the stock. But this change is slow. At the same time, there are many more words joining in than dropping out.

(3) Productivity. Words of the basic word stock are mostly root words or monosyllabic words. They can each be used alone, and at the same time can form new words with other roots and affixes. For example, dog is the father of doglike, doghood, dog cart, dog-cheap, dog-ear, dog-fall, dog fight, doghole, dog-paddle, and dogsleep.

(4) Polysemy. Words belonging to the basic word stock often possess more than one meaning because most of them have undergone semantic changes in the course of use and have become polysemous. One example will suffice for illustration. The verb take may mean: move or carry from one place to another; to remove or use without permission or by mistake; to seize or capture; to get for oneself; to get hold of (something) with the hands; to be willing to accept; to bear or endure; to need (a stated amount of time); to perform the actions connected with; to test or measure; to write down; to have the intended effect or to work successfully (LDCE).

(5) Collocability. Many words of the basic word stock exhibit quite a number of set expression, idiomatic usages, proverbial sayings and the like. Instances are numerous. Take 'heart for example: a change of heart, after one's heart; a heart of gold; at heart;



break one's heart; cross one's heart; cry one's heart out; eat one's heart out; have one's heart in one's mouth; heart and hand; heart and soul; one's heart sinks within one; take something to heart; wear one's heart upon one's sleeve; with all one's heart and so on.

Of course, not all the words of the basic word stock have these characteristics. Pronouns and numerals, for instance, enjoy nationwide use and stability, but are semantically monosemous and have limited productivity and collocability. Therefore, "all national character" is the most important of all features that may differentiate words of common use from all others.

Words, void of the stated characteristics, do not belong to the common core of the language. They include the following:

(1) Terminology consists of technical terms used in particular disciplines and academic areas as in medicine: photostanning, hepatitis, indigestion, penicillin; in music: symphony, orchestra, sonata, concerto, etc. .

(2) Jargon refers to the specialized vocabulary by which members of particular arts, sciences, trades and professions communicate among themselves such as in business: bottom line for "inescapable implication, unavoidable result, ultimate version"; ballpark figures for "estimate"; in horse-racing: hold him back for "prevent a horse from winning", hold him in for "force a horse to run behind at the beginning of a race so as to reserve speed for the finish". Generally speaking, people outside the circle have difficulty in understanding such words.

(3) Slang belongs to the sub-standard language, a category that seems to stand between the standard general words including informal ones available to everyone and in-group words like cant (shoptalk of any sub-group), jargon and argot, all of which are associated with, or most available to, specific groups of the population. Certain words are labeled as slang not because of their appearance or pronunciation but because of their usage. Dough and bread, for instance, are standard when they are used as food terms but slang in the sense of "money". Similarly, grass and pot have standard or formal use meaning, respectively, i. e. "type of plant life" and "cooking utensil", but slang use meaning "marijuana". Such words as beaver (girl), smoky, bear (police), catch (talk to), holler (call), Roger (understand), X-rays (radar) are all slang words (Fensch in P. E. schholz et. al. 1978). The concept "head" can be referred to by nut, dome, upper, bean, block and so on; in the same way, the meaning of "drunk" can be expressed in as many terms as over three hundred, such as elevated, merry, jolly, comfortable, boiled, grassy, tight, knocked out, blue-eye, fried, paralyzed, pickled, stiff, stunned (秦秀白 1988).

These examples indicate that much of the slang is created by changing or extending



the meaning of existing words though some slang words are new coinages altogether. Slang enjoys popular use. Almost everyone uses some slang sometimes, and some people use a lot of slang often. Those who do not go to offices seldom find themselves in formal situations, and those who spend more time with close friends than business associates and mere acquaintances, use the most slang, because slang is colorful, blunt, expressive and impressive. As some people claim, slang avoids pretensions. It is “language that rolls up its sleeves” and gets to work.

(4) Argot generally refers to the jargon of criminals. Its use is confined to the sub-cultural groups, and outsiders can hardly understand it, e. g. can-opener (all-purpose key), dip (pick - pocket), persuader (dagger).

(5) Dialectal words are words used only by speakers of the dialect in question. For example, beauty (AusE = excellent, great), chook (AusE = chicken), auld (ScotE = old), coo (ScotE = cow), hog (IrE = swamp).

(6) Archaisms are words or forms that were once in common use but are now restricted only to specialized or limited use. They are found mainly in ancient poems, legal documents and religious writing or speech. Here are some examples: thou (you), ye (plural you), thee (objective you), wilt (will), brethren (brother), quoth (said), hereof (of this, concerning this), there from (from that or there).

(7) Neologisms are newly-created words or expressions, or words that have taken on new meanings. Here are some examples from 12,000 words: microelectronics = the branch of electronics dealing with integrated circuits, futurology = a study that deals with future possibilities based on current trends, AIDS = acquired immune deficiency syndrome, E-mail = electronic mail, the sending of messages via computer systems.

## 2. Content Words and Functional Words

By notion, words can be categorized into content words and functional words. Content words denote clear notions and thus are known as notional words. They are nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and numerals, which denote notions of objects, phenomena, action, quality, state, degree, quantity, etc. e. g. earth, cloud, run, walk, bright, dark, never, frequently, five, December.

Functional words do not have notions of their own. Therefore, they are also called empty words. Since their chief function is to express the relation between notions—the relation between words as well as between sentences—they are also known as form words. Prepositions, conjunctions, auxiliaries and articles belong to this category. Examples are on, of, upon, and, but, do (does, did), be (am, is, are, were), a, the and others.

Content words, which constitute the main body of the English vocabulary, are numerous, and the number is ever growing whereas functional words, which make up a ver-



y small number of the vocabulary, remain stable. Unlike content words, functional words do far more work of expression in English on average than content words.

### 3. Native Words and Borrowed Words

As far as the origins of the words are concerned, English words can be grouped into native words and borrowed words. Native words are not native in fact but words brought to Britain in the fifth century by the German tribes; the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes, thus known as Anglo-Saxon words. Words of Anglo-Saxon origin are small in number, but they form the mainstream of the basic word stock and stand at the core of the language. Therefore, what is true of the basic word stock is also true of native words. Apart from the characteristics mentioned of the basic word stock, native words have a few other features:

#### (1) Neutral in Style

Since native words denote the commonest things in human society, they are used by all people, in all places, on all occasions, and at all times. Therefore, they are not stylistically specific. This can be illustrated by a comparison between synonyms.

begin(E)—commence(F)

brotherly(E)—fraternal(F)

kingly(E)—royal(F)—regal(L)

rise(E)—mount(F)—ascend(L)

Words marked E are native words and the rest are all borrowed. Stylistically, native words are neither formal nor informal whereas the words borrowed from French or Latin are literary and learned, thus appropriate in formal style.

#### (2) Frequent in Use

Like other words in the basic word stock, native ones are most frequently used in everyday speech and writing. Its use is perhaps just the opposite of its number. Native words in use run usually as high as from 70 to 90 percent. This figure can be verified by the following data:

Author or Book	Native	Foreign
Spenser	86%	14%
Shakespeare	90%	10%
King James Bible	94%	6%
Milton	81%	19%
Addison	82%	18%
Swift	75%	25%
Pope	80%	20%
Johnson	72%	28%



Gibbon	70%	30%
Macaulay	75%	25%
Tennyson	88%	12%

These data do not apply to all usage situations and are open to variation in academic fields and sciences where many more words of French, Latin or Greek origin will be used.

Words taken over from foreign languages are known as borrowed words, loan words or just borrowings in simple terms. English is a heavy borrower and has adopted words from all other major languages of the world. It is estimated that English borrowing constitute 80 percent of the modern English vocabulary. As is stated in Encyclopedia Americana, "The English language has vast debts. In any dictionary some 80% of the entries are borrowed." (1980 Vol. 10, p. 423) The English language is noted for the remarkable complexity and heterogeneity of its vocabulary because of its extensive borrowings. Baugh (1978) talks of the English vocabulary as "cosmopolitan vocabulary", which reveals the true feature of the English vocabulary. According to the degree of assimilation and manner of borrowing, we can divide the loan-words into four classes.

#### (1) Denizens

Denizens are words borrowed early in the past and now are well assimilated into the English language. In other words they have come to conform to the English way of pronunciation and spelling. Some of the words are so successfully assimilated that only trained professionals may be aware of their origin. Words of this group are early borrowings from Latin, Greek, French and Scandinavian, e. g. port from portus (L), cup from cuppa (L), shift from skipa (ON), shirt from skyta (ON), change from changier (F), pork from porc (F).

#### (2) Aliens

Aliens are borrowed words which have retained their original pronunciation and spelling. These words are immediately recognizable as foreign in origin. They are words like décor (F), blitzkrieg (G), kowtow (CH), bazaar (Per), rajar (Hin), status quo (L), intermezzo (IT), emir (Arab).

#### (3) Translation Loans

Translation loans are words and expressions formed from the existing material in the English language but modeled on the patterns taken from another language. Such words can also be subdivided.

Words translated according to the meaning:

mother tongue from lingua maternal (L)

a slip of the tongue from lapsus linguae (L)

surplus value from Mehrwert(G)  
 masterpiece from Meisterstück(G)  
 black humor from humour noir(F)

Words translated according to the sound:

kulak from kyak(Russ)  
 ketchup from fānqiéjiāng(CH dial)  
 lama from lama(Lib)  
 tea from t'e(CH dial)

#### (4) Semantic Loans

Words of this category are not borrowed with reference to the form but to the meaning. In other words, English has borrowed a new meaning for an existing word in the language. Take the English word dream for instance. The word originally meant "joy" and "music", its modern meaning was borrowed later from the Norse. Pioneer once signified "explorer" only or "person doing pioneering work", and it now has taken on the new meaning of "a member of the Young Pioneer" from Russian. The meaning "stupid" of the word dumb comes from the German word dumm. Likewise, fresh has adopted the meaning of "impertinent, sassy, cheeky" under the influence of the German word frech.

## 1.2 Vocabulary

All the words in a language make up what is generally known as its vocabulary. The term "vocabulary" is used in different senses. Vocabulary is most commonly used to refer to the sum total of all the words of a language. It can also refer to all the words of a given dialect, a book, a subject, and all the words possessed by an individual person as well as all the words current in a particular period of time in history. English is one of the world's highly developed languages. Naturally, the vocabulary is one of the largest and richest. The general estimate of the vocabulary is over one million words.

Vocabulary can be divided into five types: reading vocabulary, listening vocabulary, speaking vocabulary, writing vocabulary and focal vocabulary. A literate person's reading vocabulary is all the words he or she can recognize when reading. A person's listening vocabulary is all the words he or she can recognize when listening to speech. This vocabulary is aided in size by context and tone of voice. A person's speaking vocabulary is all the words he or she can use in speech. Due to the spontaneous nature of the speaking vocabulary, words are often misused. This misuse—though slight and unintention-





al—may be compensated by facial expressions, tone of voice, or hand gestures. Focal vocabulary is a specialized set of terms and distinctions that is particularly important to a certain group, those with a particular focus of experience or activity.

The importance of a vocabulary can be summarized as follows:

- An extensive vocabulary aids expressions and communication.
- Vocabulary size has been directly linked to reading comprehension.
- Linguistic vocabulary is synonymous with thinking vocabulary.
- A person may be judged by others based on his or her vocabulary.

Vocabulary size has a great effect on language comprehension. The knowledge of the words deriving from the 2,000 most frequent English words provides a comprehension of 95% of word use. The figures look even better than this if we want to cover the words we come across in an informally spoken context. Then the 2,000 most common words would cover 100% of the vocabulary. More recent work contests this, concluding that knowledge of 5,000 word families is necessary for 95% word coverage.

Exposure to conversations and engaging in conversation with others help school-age children develop vocabulary. Fast mapping is the process of learning a new concept upon a single exposure and is used in word learning not only by infants and toddlers, but by preschool children and adults as well. This principle is very useful for word learning in conversational settings, as words tend not to be explained explicitly in conversation, but may be referred to frequently throughout the span of a conversation.

Reading is considered to be a key element of vocabulary development in school-age children. Before children are able to read on their own, children can learn from others reading to them. Learning vocabulary from these experiences includes using context, as well as explicit explanations of words and/or events in the story. This may be done using illustrations in the book to guide explanation and provides a visual reference or comparisons, usually to prior knowledge and past experiences. Interactions between the adult and the child often include the child's repetition of the new word back to the adult. When a child begins to learn to read, their print vocabulary and oral vocabulary tend to be the same, as children use their vocabulary knowledge to match verbal forms of words with written forms. These two forms of vocabulary are usually equal up until grade 3. Because written language is much more diverse than spoken language, print vocabulary begins to expand beyond oral vocabulary. By age 10, children's vocabulary development through reading moves away from learning concrete words to learning abstract words.

Generally, both conversation and reading involve at least one of the four principles of context that are used in word learning and vocabulary development: physical context,