

New English Lexicology

高等院校  
英语专业规划教材

# 新编 英语词汇学

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# 新编 英语词汇学

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# 前 言

何谓英语词汇学？不少学生误以为，英语词汇学就是“学英语词汇”，把词汇学与市面上的各种词汇学习记忆手册联系起来。其实，英语词汇学是高校英语专业一门语言学基础专业理论课程，它运用现代语言学的有关理论，研究英语语言中的词汇问题。学习本课程可以使英语专业的学生系统地掌握完整的英语词汇知识，深入地了解英语词汇的现状及其历史演变过程，并能对现代英语词汇发展中出现的各种词汇现象做出理论分析和解释，提高对英语词语的理解、阐释和综合运用的能力，并培养语言学理论兴趣。由此可见，英语词汇学绝对不是一般意义上的“学词汇”，尽管它对英语词汇的学习很有帮助。我们需要明确，像英语词汇学这类语言学课程的开设和教学也是高校培养创新型外语专业人才的应有之意，具有重要的理论价值和实践意义。

众所周知，英语词汇学的研究和教学无论是在英美国家还是我国都起步较晚，正如葛传棻先生所说，“英语词汇学即使在英美也未见有专书论述，其内容有关部分散见于各种书刊中的也不多。”只是从八十年代初始，作为一门独立学科的英语词汇学的研究和教学才在我国逐步开展起来。这期间我国出版的英语词汇学的专著或教材主要有汪榕培编著的《实用英语词汇学》、陆国强编著的《现代英语词汇学》、林福美编著的《现代英语词汇学》、张韵斐编著的《现代英语词汇学概论》、林承璋编著的《英语词汇学引论》、曹务堂编著的《简明英语词汇学教程》、汪榕培编著的《英语词汇学研究》等，这些著作或教材都为我国英语词汇学研究作出了贡献。

《新编英语词汇学》共有十章，在参考以上专著及教材优点的基础上，以现代语言学理论为指导，以英语词汇为研究对象，内容主要涉及现代英语词汇的形态结构、构成方式、内容、发展变化、词的形式和内容的关系、词汇之间的意义关系、词汇的语义特征、词的联想和搭配、习语、美国英语词汇等，并附有词汇学

专业术语英汉对照表。全书引用的例证力求反映现代英语词汇使用的特点和发展趋势,努力跟上时代的步伐。

本书由杨连瑞教授任主编,朱跃教授、李玲教授、陈颖博士、刘坤老师任副主编,美国学者 John Liontas 博士、尹洪山博士、布占廷博士参加了部分章节的审读工作,最后由杨连瑞教授统稿定稿。值得说明的是,笔者曾先后八届教授英语专业本科生英语词汇学课程,在教学和编写《新编英语词汇学》讲义的过程中,参考了大量的国内外有关著作;由于边教学边编写,时间跨度大,其中某些观点和例句来源等不能一一注明出处,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。

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本书根据高等院校英语专业英语词汇学教学要求编写而成,主要用作高等院校英语专业教材,对于广大英语教师和相关研究者亦有一定的参考价值。

杨连瑞

2010年1月

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# *Introduction*

## CHAPTER

### 1

#### **1.1 What Is Lexicology?**

Lexicology, a branch of linguistics, inquires into the origins and meanings of words. The term lexicology comes from Greek morphemes “lexi” and “logos”; the former means “word or phrase”, while the latter means “a department of knowledge”, the literal meaning of lexicology. In a word, it is the science of the word. English lexicology aims at investigating and studying the morphological structures of English words and word equivalents, their semantic structures, meaning relations, historical development, formation and usages. Generally speaking, the term vocabulary refers to all the words of a given language, while the term word refers to the fundamental unit of a given language, with sound and meaning, and is capable of performing a given syntactic function.

English lexicology is a theoretically oriented course. It is chiefly concerned with the basic theories of words in general and of English words in particular. However, it is a practical course as well, students should inevitably deal with copious stocks of words and idioms, and study a great many usage examples. A great deal of practice is therefore a must.

#### **1.2 English Lexicology and Its Relation to Other Disciplines**

English lexicology itself is a sub-branch of linguistics and is closely related to

morphology, semantics, etymology, stylistics, and lexicography. Each one of them has already been established as a discipline in its own right.

To begin with, morphology studies the structures or forms of words, primarily through the use of morpheme construction—one of the major concerns of lexicology. We shall discuss the inflections of words and word-formation and examine how morphemes are combined to form words and how words are combined to form sentences.

Traditionally, morphology is used for the study of the origins and history of the form and meaning of words. Modern English, for example, is derived from the languages of early Germanic tribes with a fairly small vocabulary. We shall study how this small vocabulary has grown into a large modern English vocabulary and explain the changes that have taken place in the forms and meanings of words. In addition, morphological structure is the study of meanings of different linguistic levels: lexis, syntax, utterance, discourse, etc. But lexicology will also focus on the lexical level. The types of meaning and sense relations such as polysemy, homonymy, synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy and semantic field all fall under the scope of semantic study and constitute an important part of lexicology.

Semantics is the study of the meanings of words and other parts of language. It investigates the nature, structure, development and changes of word meaning. Polysemy, homonymy, synonymy, antonymy, metaphor, metonymy and other rhetorical devices are all within the scope of the study of semantics.

Etymology studies the meaning, origin and history of individual words and their development. Historical lexicology studies the development of vocabulary as a whole on the basis of etymology from a historical point of view.

Stylistics is the study of style. It is concerned with the user's choices of linguistic elements in a particular context for special effects. Among the areas of study (e. g. lexis, phonology, syntax, graphology), we shall concentrate on lexis, exploring the stylistic values of words.

Lexicography shares with lexicology the same concerns: the form, meaning, origins and usages of words, but they have a pragmatic difference. A lexicographer's task is to record the language as it is used so as to present a genuine picture of words to the reader, thereby providing authoritative reference. In contrast, a lexicologist's task is to acquire the knowledge and information of lexis so as to increase lexical awareness and capacity of language use.

Even though English lexicology covers a great many academic areas, our task remains one and the same: to study English words in different aspects and from

different angles.

### 1.3 Methods of Study

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 might be taking place. For example, the word “wife” now means “a married woman, esp. in relation to her husband”. This is the current meaning. It has an obsolete meaning (woman), which is only preserved in midwife, housewife, etc. However, if we were to take a diachronic perspective, we would consider the word historically, looking into its origin and changes in both its form and meaning. In this light, the word “wife” evolved from the Old English form “wif”, meaning “woman”, but in the course of development it became later specialized to today’s modern meaning “a married woman”. In our linguistic inquiry into the English vocabulary, though our focus is on the synchronic description of words, we need the diachronic approach as a supplement, precisely because a knowledge of historical development of the vocabulary can immensely aid our understanding of language study.

### 1.4 Aims and Significance of the Course

Language study involves the study of speech sounds, grammar and vocabulary. Among them, vocabulary has proved particularly important and certainly the most difficult. In the discussion of the relationship between words and structure, the lexicologist McCarthy (1990) asserts that:

No matter how well the student learns grammar, no matter how successfully he masters the sounds of a L2, without words to express a wide range of meanings, communication in that language cannot happen in any meaningful way. The role of vocabulary in communication calls for continuing vocabulary learning.

Since English Lexicology deals with English vocabulary, this course will definitely be beneficial. Thus, a good knowledge of morphological structure of English words and rules of word-formation will help learners develop learners personal vocabulary and consciously increase their word power. The information of the historical development and the principles of classification will give them a deeper understanding of word-meaning and will enable them to organize, classify and store words more effectively. The understanding of the semantic structures of words and the types of meaning and their sense relations will gradually raise learners

awareness of meaning and usages, and will enable them to use words more accurately and appropriately. A working knowledge of dictionaries will not only improve learners' skills of using reference books but also raise their problem-solving ability and efficiency of individual study. In a word, the study of lexicology will ultimately improve learners' receptive and productive skills in both language processing and language production.

## Exercises

1. *What is lexicology?*
2. *What is the nature and scope of English Lexicology?*
3. *What subject is English Lexicology associated with? And to what extent?*
4. *Why should a student of English study English Lexicology?*
5. *Complete the following sentences with a suitable word for each blank :*
  - 1) Lexicology is a branch of linguistics, inquiring into the origins and \_\_\_\_\_ of words. English Lexicology is both a theoretically oriented course and a \_\_\_\_\_ course. On the one hand, it is chiefly concerned with the basic \_\_\_\_\_ of words in general and of English words in particular. On the other hand, we have to deal with copious stocks of words and idioms with \_\_\_\_\_ examples which are of great importance to language learning.
  - 2) English Lexicology investigates and studies the \_\_\_\_\_ structures of English words and word equivalents, their semantic structures, relations, historical development, \_\_\_\_\_ and usages.
  - 3) English Lexicology is associated with morphology, \_\_\_\_\_, etymology, stylistics, Lexicography. \_\_\_\_\_ comes to work when the inflections of words, word-formation, and how morphemes are combined to form words and words to form sentences are involved in the study of English Lexicology; semantics when English Lexicology deals with polysemy, homonyms, synonyms, \_\_\_\_\_, hyponymy and semantic field of words; \_\_\_\_\_ when English Lexicology deals with the origins and historical changes of English words in their forms and meanings; \_\_\_\_\_ when English Lexicology deals with the styles or the stylistic values of words; \_\_\_\_\_ when English Lexicology deals with the compiling of a dictionary to provide authoritative reference to readers.

# *Basic Concepts of Words and Vocabulary*

## CHAPTER

## 2

### **2.1 Definition of a Word**

What is a word? The definition of a word has engaged the attention of philosophers and linguists for ages. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle defined a word 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. “antiestablishment”, which contains three morphemes (anti-, -establish-, -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 “antiestablishment” for example. It contains a free form or morpheme *establish* and two bound forms or morphemes *anti-* and *-ment*. The former (*establish*) can be used independently as a word while the latter (*anti-* and *-ment*) cannot appear in isolation, but must be attached to the free form or morpheme *establish*.

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.

Given the above two definitions by Bloomfield and Meillet, we may define a word as an independent lexical unit and a minimum free form, with a unity of sound and meaning (both lexical and grammatical), capable of performing a given grammatical function. A word may act as a complete utterance, as in exclamation “Liar!”, “Help!” and in replies such as “Tom” in answer to the question “What is his name?” or “Five” to the question “How old is he?” But more frequently, a word is used as a part of a sentence (subject, predicate verb, object).

Words may also be defined in phonological and orthographical terms. Phonologically, a spoken word is a phoneme or combination of phonemes, marked by a given position of stress. Orthographically, a written word is a printed symbol, with a space on either side of it but none within it, with the exception of compounds either hyphenated or written open like “air-blower” and “air base”.

Words can be simple or complex, 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. However, there are words which can be complex such as “*mis • for • tune*”, a polysyllabic word which can function as subject, object and predicate in a sentence. Though *misfortune* can be further divided into *mis* and *fortune*, *mis* cannot stand alone as a word. In contrast, “blackmail” can be separated into *black* and *mail*, and both can work as independent units in a sentence, the meaning of each, however, is by no means the combination of the two. *Black* is a color, opposite to *white*, and *mail* denotes “something sent by post”, yet when they are put together, the combined form means “compel, compulsion, to make payment or action in return for concealment of discreditable secrets, etc.” Hence *blackmail* is a different word (COD).

## 2.2 Sound and Meaning

A word is a symbol that stands for something else in the world. Each of the world’s cultures has certain sounds representing certain persons, things, places, properties, processes and activities outside the language system. This symbolic connection is almost always arbitrary, and there is no logical relationship between the sound which stands for a thing or an idea and the actual thing or idea itself. A dog is called a dog not because the sound and the three letters that make up the word just automatically suggest the animal in question. It is only symbolic. The relationship

between them is conventional because people of the same speech community have agreed to refer to the animal with this cluster of sounds. In different languages the same concept can be represented by different sounds. On the one hand, *woman* becomes *Frau* in German, *femme* in French and *funü* in Chinese. On the other hand, the same sound [mi:t] is used to mean *meet*, *meat*, *mete*. *Knight* and *night*, for example, denote entirely different things, yet have the same sound.

## 2.3 Sound and Form

In the days of Old English, the speech was represented very much more faithfully in writing than it is today. With the development of the language, however, more and more differences have occurred between the two. The reason for this is that the English alphabet was adopted from the Romans, which does not have a separate letter to represent each sound in the language so that some letters must do double duty or work together in combination.

Similarly, the pronunciation has changed more rapidly than spelling over the years, and in some cases the two have come to represent distinct characteristics. During the last five hundred years, though the sounds of speech have changed considerably, there have been no corresponding changes in spelling.

Sound changes aside, some of the differences were created by the early scribes. In the early days, the spelling differences did not matter very much as people were not so used to seeing words in print, and the spelling was not fixed as it is today. As a result, not everyone was sure how some English words should be spelled. Sometimes, people deliberately changed the spelling of words either to make a line even or to make recognition easier. Before the printing press was brought to England, everything was written by hand. Those scribes, who made a living by writing for other people, often worked in haste to meet the needs of the King, Church, and merchants. One problem was that several letters written with short vertical strokes such as *i*, *u*, *v*, *m*, *w* and *n* looked all alike. Consequently, their handwriting caused misunderstanding. To solve the problem in part, they changed the letter *u* to *o* when it came before *m*, *n*, or *v*. This is how *sum*, *cum*, *wuman*, *wunder*, *munk* came to be written as *some*, *come*, *woman*, *wonder*, *monk*. At some point, too, the scribes seemed to have decided that no English word should end in *n* or *v*. Thus, in time, an *e* was added to such words as *live*, *have*, *due*, and *true*, but not pronounced.

Finally comes the borrowing, which is an important channel of enriching the English vocabulary. When English borrowed words from other languages, it

borrowed spelling as well. The early borrowings were assimilated and the later ones, however, did not conform to the rules of English pronunciation and spelling, e. g. *stimulus* (L), *denouement* (F), *fiesta* (Sp), *eureka* (Gr) and *kimono* (Jap).

The written form of English is, therefore, an imperfect representation of the spoken form. In spite of the differences, at least eighty percent of the English words adhere to consistent spelling patterns. And even those spellings that appear to be irregular may have more regularity and usefulness than we may realize. In words such as *hymn*, *condemn*, and *bomb*, for example, the last letter is always silent. But when these words are extended into longer ones, the silent letters become audible; *hymnal*, *condemnation* and *bombard*. This is a general rule.

## 2.4 Vocabulary

The term vocabulary is used in different senses. Not only can it refer to the total number of words in a language, it can also stand for all the words used in a particular historical period, e. g. Old English vocabulary, Middle English vocabulary and Modern English vocabulary. We also use it to refer to all the words of a given dialect, a given book, a given discipline and the words possessed by an individual person.

## 2.5 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.

### 2.5.1 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, dogfight, 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 expressions, idiomatic usages, proverbial sayings and the like. Instances are numerous. Take *heart* for example: *a change of heart, after one's heart; a heart*