

● 高等师范本科英语专业教材系列

英语语言学导论

(第二版)

主 编 ◎ 杨 忠

高等师范本科英语专业教材系列

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(第二版)

An Introduction to Linguistics

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第二版前言

《语言学概论》(第一版)是教育部组织编写的面向高等师范学校英语专业学生的教材,旨在帮助读者掌握现代语言学的基本概念、基本理论、基本方法,引发学生对语言本质、语言学习过程、跨文化交际、语言教学原理的深入思考,培养学生初步的语言研究能力。该书出版发行十年来,以其“内容适用,语言精练,习题丰富”等特点受到读者的欢迎。

语言学是人文社会科学中的基础学科,也是认知科学的重要组成部分。20世纪80年代开始一些高校的英语专业开设“英语语言学概论课程”。1990年国家教育委员会颁布的《高等学校英语专业高年级英语教学大纲》(试行本)中规定的课程设置将“英语语言学概论”包括在内。近年来,这门课程在许多高校已成为英语专业高年级学生必修课程。我国高等学校类型多,各校英语专业培养目标迥异,学生的基础和需求不尽一致。多样的需求要求有多本教材,然而国内学者编著的英语语言学概论教材的种类还不够多。杨忠教授组织专业人士,对原教材进行了修订,改名为《英语语言学导论》,适当充实、更新了部分内容,以适应普通高等学校英语专业学生的需要。

语言学研究领域广泛,派别林立,理论频出,合理地取舍内容是编著好语言学概论教材的首要原则。本书以向英语专业本科生介绍英语语言学的基本理论、研究方法、前沿问题、最新成果为宗旨,全书分为五部分。第一部分(第一章)概述语言的本质、功能、分类、起源和语言学的对象、性质、分支。第二部分(第二、三、四、五、六章)介绍语言符号系统的分相研究,即语音研究、结构研究和语义研究。第三部分(第七、八章)概述语言使用研究,即语用学和语篇分析。第四部分(第九、十章)阐述语言与社会、语言与文化的关系。第五部分(第十一、十二章)分析语言学习过程和语言教学原理。整体结构及各章内容的选择都首先遵循“适用”原则。由于课时所限,不求全面深入地介绍该学科。考虑本科生的基础,本书不涉及多有争议的观点。对于新兴语言学流派不采取系统介绍的处理方式,而是将其中适用的内容分别安排于相应章节。例如,对认知语言学的一些研究成果分别在语义学、语用学、语篇分析三章中加以介绍。

语言学专业术语多,往往成为初学者入门的障碍。然而已故许国璋教授指出,术语多意味着范畴多,范畴越多则思维越细腻,对于学习者来说掌握这些术语是宝贵的智力栽培。如何帮助初学者掌握语言学的基本概念是教材编著者应努力解决的问题。我们认为,在文字表述方面应力求深入浅出,既要引经据典,又必须以浅显易懂的语言行文,确保学生读得懂。在介绍重要概念时应辅以具体的例子。本书后另附有英汉术语表。

语言学理论比较抽象，初学者难以理解，课后容易忘记。如何帮助学生“消化”所学内容是教材编著者和任课教师都要思考和解决的问题。语言学也同其他科学一样，在发展过程中原有理论被证伪，新理论提出，证伪以问题为先导。要帮助学生进入这一学科就要引导他们注意语言学工作者如何发现问题、提出问题、解决问题。引导的最有效方式是让他们思考，让他们做习题，在做题过程中培养归纳推理和演绎推理的能力。出于这样的考虑及我们的教学实践，本书每章后安排了辅导问题、习题、小课题。小课题旨在启发学生发掘语言学研究题目，为撰写语言学方向的毕业论文打基础。本书后附有习题参考答案，便于学生自学。

根据《高等学校英语专业高年级英语教学大纲》（试行本），“英语语言学概论”授课一个学期，每周2课时。本书按36课时设计，建议教师这样分配课时：第一章和第七章用4课时；第五章、第六章用6课时；其余各章用2课时。

《英语语言学导论》的编写计划由主编者拟定。第八章由杨玉晨教授撰稿，第十章由狄艳华博士撰稿，第四、五章由林正军博士修改，第七章由于秀成博士修改。杨忠教授修改其余各章，并在杨玉晨、林正军协助下完成全书统稿。

《英语语言学导论》的出版得到中国人民大学出版社外语出版分社的大力支持，在此向他们表示衷心感谢！

由于编著者水平所限，书中定有不足之处，欢迎读者和专家指正。

编著者

2011年10月12日

Introduction (to the 1st edition)

Introducing Linguistics, by Professor Yang Zhong of Northeast Normal University, traces the development of modern linguistics and offers insights into the issues affecting foreign language teachers today. Professor Yang focuses each chapter on a particular aspect of linguistics, ranging from phonology to Second Language Acquisition (SLA), providing a comprehensive explanation of the research development in each area and underscoring research questions of interest to linguists today. Following each chapter is a set of activities which allow the reader to test his comprehension of the material discussed. In the final chapter, Professor Yang stresses the importance of linguistics study to second language teaching. Teachers will no doubt find this book a valuable resource in their professional development.

David McGirt

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1.1 The multifaceted nature of language

We use language in most of our waking life (and sometimes in dreams, too). Language is so indispensable to us that we all tend to take it for granted. Few of us ever think about what it is that allows us to talk about everything in the universe and our inner world, and to do things together with others. As a learner of a foreign language, have you ever thought about the nature of the subject that you learn through painstaking efforts?

Probing into this question, one may understand the multifaceted nature of language. Language is many things indeed: a medium of communication, a system of code, a carrier of culture, an instrument for thinking, a glue of a community, a social institution... This multifaceted nature of language explains the fact that there is no universally accepted definition of language. Linguists must face up to this question, as language is the object of study in their research. Hundreds of definitions have been proposed in the past. We cite a few here for discussion.

Language is a system whose parts can and must be considered in their synchronic solidarity. (de Saussure, 1916)

[Language is] a set (finite or infinite) of sentences, each finite in length and constructed out of a finite set of elements. (Chomsky, 1957)

Language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols. (Sapir, 1921)

Each of these definitions pinpoints some aspects of the essence of language, but all have left out something. Chomsky defines language by pointing out its connotation, while Sapir's definition focuses on its function.

In broad terms, linguists agree to define language as **“a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication”** (Wardhaugh, 1977). This definition points out what language is basically composed of and for what purpose it is used. Yet it still leaves out some connotations and functions of language. For instance, meaning, as a component of language, is not mentioned in the definition.

In addition, thinking is not touched upon in the definition, but people use language to communicate and to think. Language is composed of sounds, structure and meaning, and it is used for other purposes than communication. Language is such a multistratal and multifunctional semiotic system that no definition can cover all the constituents, features and functions that distinguish it from other communication systems.

The above definition is based on a number of theoretical assumptions. Defined as such, language is seen as unique to human beings. In other words, it is assumed that only human beings have language. Animal communication systems (bird chirps, bee dances, dog barks, and so on), are all excluded. Is this justified? Are communication systems possessed by other creatures qualitatively different from human languages?

1.2 Features of language

Many philosophers and linguists believe that language is unique to man. Language is a human trait that sets us apart from other living creatures. They spell out a number of features of language, which are not found in animal communication systems.

(1) Creativity (or productivity)

Creativity is the first and foremost striking feature of human language. It refers to the fact that language provides opportunities for sending messages that have never been sent before and for understanding novel messages. The grammatical rules and the words of a language are finite, but the sentences are infinite. Every speaker uses language creatively. Even a child acquiring his mother tongue can put speech sounds and words into novel combinations to express meanings. This feature is not found in animal communication systems. Talking birds such as parrots can imitate human utterances, but they cannot segment the sounds and the words in the phrases they imitate and put them in a different sequence.

Results of experiments show that even animals closest in kin to human beings cannot match children in learning and using language. In the 1930s, Winthrop and Luella Kellogg raised their infant son together with an infant chimpanzee named Gua. When the boy could understand *I say what I mean* and *I mean what I say*, Gua could understand neither, although it understood some words. Several decades later, another chimpanzee, named Nim Chimsky (after the famous American linguist Noam Chomsky, who states that language is unique to human beings) was taught American Sign Language, under careful experimental conditions, including record keeping and video taping. After analyzing the video tapes of Nim's conversations, the researchers found that only 12% of Nim's utterances were spontaneous, and of the 88% where the teacher initiated signing, half of Nim's responses were imitations of the teacher's utterance. Children initiate conversations more and more frequently as

they grow older. Children hardly ever imitate in conversation. Children become increasingly creative in their language use, but Nim and other chimpanzees in similar experiments showed almost no tendency toward such creativity (Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams, 2011). Facts like these seem to suggest that creativity is a feature that distinguishes human language from communication systems of other creatures.

(2) Duality

Language contains two subsystems, one of sounds and the other of meanings. If you are given the four English speech sounds [p], [l], [i] and [d], and asked to combine them into sequences that sound like English words, you will find [plid] and [pild] are permissible, while *[pdli], *[dpli], *[lipd], *[idlp], etc. are not. The permissible sequences sound like English words. But they are not, because they do not stand for anything. On the other hand, meanings are conveyed by certain speech sounds or sequences of speech sounds. In English, [BODY OF A DEAD PERSON] is expressed by the word *corpse*. In this case, we say the concept or the meaning is lexicalized. But there is no word to stand for the concept [DEAD PLANT]. When certain speech sounds correspond to a certain meaning, a unit of language arises. The same sounds can be recombined to mean something else. In some cases, the same sequence of sounds can mean different things (such as homophones, and polysemes). This shows that meanings and sounds make up two subsystems of language. No systems of animal communication possess this feature. The barks of a dog are not analyzable. Animal communication systems cannot be cut into segments and then be reorganized into meaningful sequences. In other words, human languages are discrete while animal communication systems are non-discrete.

(3) Arbitrariness

The relationship between speech sounds and the meanings they represent in the languages of the world is, for the most part, an arbitrary one. The Swiss linguist de Saussure regarded the linguistic sign as composed of signifier (sound image) and signified (referent). In his view, there is no inherent relation between the two. A building we live in with our family is called *house* in English, *maison* in French, *dom* in Russian, *casa* in Spanish. If the relationship between speech sounds and meanings were motivated (i.e. not arbitrary), the words in these languages that stand for the same thing would sound the same or similar, then people would not need to learn foreign languages.

Admittedly, there are a few words in most languages that are onomatopoeic—words of which the sounds supposedly imitate the sounds of nature. This seems to contradict arbitrariness. Nevertheless, when these words of different languages are compared, it is found that they still sound different. The English word *tick tock* is equivalent to the Chinese word *dida*, *buzz* to *wengweng*. In English, *cockadoodledoo* represents the rooster's crow, but in Russian, *kukuriku*, both are different from the Chinese expression. Based on these observations, we can say that all human languages are conventional. Most animal communications are iconic. A bee dance, for example, rather directly represents its subject matter, because a direct connection exists between the number and direction of the gyrations and the sources of nectar.

(4) Displacement

Language can be used to refer to things real or imagined, past, present or future. When we listen to news broadcast, we know what has happened far and wide in the world. What can be spoken is not limited by time and space, while animals can merely communicate about what happens here and now. The cleverest dog cannot bark to tell others how badly its parents were treated by their owner. This feature of language is due to the fact that the human brain is specially structured for language and that the brains of other species are not comparable in terms of the capacities of memory and abstraction.

(5) Cultural transmission

Language is not merely genetically transmitted from generation to generation. Children pick up their mother tongue in the process of socialization. Animal communication systems are genetically transmitted. Admittedly, the capacity for language has a genetic basis, but the particular language a person acquires or learns is a cultural fact, not a biological fact. As language is arbitrary and conventional, a child can only acquire his mother tongue through interacting with people around him.

(6) Interchangeability

All members of a speech community can send and receive messages. This is obviously true of all human languages, but not of all animal communication systems. Bee dances are not interchangeable; only foragers send messages. Nor are songs of many birds; only roosters crow.

(7) Reflexivity

Human languages can be used to describe themselves. The language used to talk about language is called **metalanguage**. When linguists write grammars or lexicographers compile dictionaries they must use metalanguage. When we teach languages as a subject we also have to use it. No evidence exists that suggests that any other species write grammars or compile dictionaries or teach the communication system to outsiders.

(8) Adaptability

Last but not the least, adaptability is another essential feature of human language. It is an open system so that all social changes can be represented. Along with social progress, innovations and new products are coded by language. Concepts that originated in other cultures may be borrowed into a natural language and new words are added. That is why dictionaries must be renewed now and then. This feature is definitely not possessed by communication systems of other creatures. For example, ducks' quacks remain the same all the time.

Linguists have observed other characteristics, but the ones discussed above are more striking, particularly the first one. These are universal features possessed by all human languages. Although some animal communication systems possess, to a very limited degree, one or another of these features except *creativity* and *duality*, none is found to have all the features. On this basis linguists tend to conclude that human languages are qualitatively different from animal communication systems.