

ENGLISH

LEXICOLOGY:

A Coursebook

英语词汇学

主 编 汪榕培 王之江 朱越峰



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Foreword

Vocabulary, as an integral component of language, comprises an important part of language teaching and learning. Lexicology, the science of the study of vocabulary, is an indispensable part of linguistics. However, the mainstream of twentieth-century linguistics has largely ignored this discipline and thus hindered the development of language research and education. Thanks to the growth of the computational science and the cognitive science, people have again realized the significance of vocabulary and paid more attention to the study of it. Lexicology has revived and provided a new impetus to language teaching and learning.

English Lexicology is one of the core courses for English majors. *English Lexicology: A Coursebook* gives a concise account of the basic concepts of the discipline, providing insights into the growth, mechanism, structure, employment and learning strategies of the English vocabulary for undergraduate students of the English major and other learners of the English language.

The present book is compiled with joint efforts with the colleagues of Hangzhou Normal University. I cherish a pleasant memory of the six years of cooperation with them and hope that the young teachers will make rapid progress in their research and teaching. I also hope that the readers will benefit from this book.

Wang Rongpei
March 3, 2011 in Suzhou

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Chapter 1

English Words and Lexicology

— Basic Concepts

Points for Thinking

1. How do you define “word”?
2. What are the differences between the physical and semantic structures of the word?
3. What is vocabulary?
4. How large do you think your vocabulary is as a college student of English?
5. Give examples to illustrate the development of lexicology.

When Ali Baba used the magic words to swing open the door of the robbers’ cave, he was dazzled by the array of precious jewels and gold piled inside. Just learning the words “Open sesame!” made him rich beyond his dreams. In a sense, all words are magic, and like the treasure in Ali Baba’s cave, a good vocabulary including the usage of words — their forms, pronunciations, histories, meanings, etc. can be an “open sesame” to success in education, professional work, and social life.

1.1 Understanding Words

Words, which help people to know the language and use the language to exchange their thoughts, are an important part of the linguistic knowledge. Every language learner may agree that we can learn thousands of words in a language but still do not know what the word is. We use words every day, yet, we find it very difficult to state explicitly what a word is. Leonard Bloomfield, one of the greatest linguists in the 20th century, gave a definition in 1933 that “a minimum free form is a word”. This can be viewed as one of the classical definitions of the word, by which Bloomfield means that the word is the smallest meaningful linguistic unit that can be used on its own. Its physical form cannot be divided into smaller units that can be used independently to convey the same meaning. For instance, *book* is a word. We cannot divide it up into smaller units that can convey meanings when they stand alone. Now let’s look at the word *bookish*, which can be analyzed into *book-* and *-ish*. While the *book* bit of *bookish* is meaningful when used independently, the same is not true with *-ish* which cannot be used on its own, though it means something like “having the (objectionable) qualities of” (as in *childish*, *devilish*, *impish*, *mannish*, *sheepish*, *womanish*, etc.).

There is much need to understand what a word is in an explicit and systematic manner. In order to do this, we should have an awareness of the “nature” of words. Words should be seen in terms of their phonological and grammatical dimensions and their semantic (meaning) relationships, and not simply as isolated entities, each carrying one fixed “meaning”.

1. 1. 1 The physical structure of the word

By the physical structure of a word, we mean the word's external structure from a morphological point of view. If we look at the word *revitalized*, we can see that it can be analyzed into several units of meaning: *re-vital-ize-d*. These smaller elements can be recognized as parts of other words in which they have the same meaning. For instance, the element *re* occurs in *repossess* and *retake* with the meaning of *again*. *Vital* occurs by itself as a word and in *vitality* with the meaning of *life* or *liveliness*. The element *ize* occurs in *nationalize* and *pluralize*, with the function of *change this adjective into a verb*. Finally, the element *(e)d* occurs in *tied* and *turned* with the meaning of *past tense or past participle*. These smaller units of meaning are called *morphemes* and may be defined as the minimal units of meaning in a language. All these morphemes constitute the physical structure of the word *revitalized*. It should be borne in mind that the knowledge of the word's physical structure helps us decode words and acquire their morphologically related forms, e. g.

kind — *kindly, kindness, kindness, unkind, unkindly*;

like — *likely, unlike, unlikely, alike, likelihood*;

live — *alive, lively, liven, enliven, liveliness, livelihood*;

pure — *impure, impurity, purify, purification*;

response — *responsive, responsible, irresponsible, responsibility*.

The above groupings of word families or “paradigms” are useful in making us aware of the morphological rules of the word.

In a word which is composed of more than one morpheme there is a central one which contains the principal meaning, and a peripheral one or peripheral ones attached to the central morpheme. For example, in *undecided*, the morpheme *decide* is central, while *un-* and *-ed* are peripheral. The central morpheme is called the *root* while the peripheral morphemes are called *affixes*. Compounding, which involves the combination of more than one root to form a new word (e. g. *babysit, teapot*), and conversion, which involves a change in the word class of a word without the addition of affixes (e. g. *object* n. — *object* v.), are two more major morphological types in the physical structure of a word.

The physical structure of a word is concerned with various word-formation patterns which will be further discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Task

Many English words are formed from combinations of words and prefixes or suffixes, or from combinations of other words. It is plausible to be able to find a connection between the meaning of a combination and the meanings of its parts. So if you find a new word, you may be able to guess what it means.

Match the items in Column I to those in Column II

Column I

1. biopic
2. point of view
3. contradict
4. pro-education
5. observatory

Column II

- A. a place where scientists look at stars, etc.
- B. to say the opposite of a statement, opinion, etc.
- C. an idea or opinion
- D. a film based on the events of someone's life
- E. in favor of education

Key: 1. D 2. C 3. B 4. E 5. A

1.1.2 The semantic structure of the word

A word's semantic or internal structure, is commonly referred to as its meaning. Words can serve the purposeful communication of human beings solely due to their meanings. So it is certain that the semantic structure is one of the word's main aspects, which is about the meanings of words and what is meant by *meaning*. Among the word's various characteristics, *meaning* is definitely the most important, for the very function of the word in a language is made by its possessing of a meaning. Only through the meaning can a concept be communicated. A word has the ability of denoting concrete objects, real qualities, actual actions and abstract notions.

Denotation refers to the conceptual meaning of the word. When we want to know the meaning of a word, it is its denotation that we ask for. For example, we may define *great* as *big, large, huge* and *grand*; therefore we may say that *great* denotes *big, large, huge* and *grand*. However, *great* may have other meanings or denotations: *more than usual, important/powerful, enthusiastic about something or someone, able to do something very well, for expressing pleasure or agreement, very good / enjoyable / attractive, showing relationships between previous generations of family members, very well (adv.), someone who is admired by a lot of people, especially someone famous (n.)*, etc.

For example,

China is a *great* country with a population of more than 1.3 billion people.

Albert Einstein was one of the *great* scientists in the 20th century.

A huge earthquake hit Wenchuan in Sichuan Province on May 12, 2008, causing the *greatest* environmental disaster in decades in China.

The representatives of NPC are entering the *Great* Hall of the People in Beijing.

The really *great* thing about this computer is its speed.

She is *great* at mathematics and physics.

Isn't she *great* with the children?

I have never been a *great* one for spiders and snakes.

She's a *great* reader of biographies.

Your *great*-aunt is the sister of one of your grandparents.

I don't think that we played *great*.

Fred Perry is one of the all-time *greats* of tennis.

Great Britain is used for referring to the unity of England, Scotland and Wales. It is often simply called Britain.

The different denotations of a word may be related to its basic meaning, e. g.

father — one's male parent, e. g. People often call their *father* Dad or, especially if they are young children, Daddy.

— a title of respect for a priest, especially a Roman Catholic priest, e. g. *Father* Peter said that that wasn't a sin.

— used for talking to or about God in the Christian religion, e. g. Heavenly *Father*, please hear our prayers.

— *Father* Christmas (Santa Claus or Santa: an imaginary old man with a long white beard and a red suit who brings presents for children at Christmas).

— the *father* of something, the man who started something or first did it successfully, e. g. Albert Einstein was the *father* of modern physics.

head — of a human body, e. g. I saw a bruise on the side of her *head*.

— of a company, a school, etc. (the leader or most important person in a group)

e. g. The ceremony was attended by *heads* of government from twenty-seven countries.

— of a bed, a table, etc. (the top or front part of something) e. g. He walked straight to the *head* of the queue. / When we have dinner, my grandfather always sits at the *head* of the table.

The different denotations may be unrelated, e. g.

order — an instruction given by someone in a position of authority, e. g. Try to persuade your employees — don't just give *orders*.

— a request for a product to be made for you or delivered to you, e. g. A major *order* for a hundred thousand cars will guarantee the company's future.

— the way in which a set of things is arranged or done, so that it is clear which thing is first, second, third, etc. e. g. Please try to keep the pictures in *order*.

— a situation in which people obey the law and follow the accepted rules of social behavior, e. g. The police's most urgent task will be to maintain *order*.

row — a series of people or things arranged in a straight line, e. g. We can see a *row* of new houses by the river. / The soldiers stood in a *row* against the wall.

— a short journey in a rowing boat, e. g. Let's go for a *row* on the lake on Sunday.

— (v.) to move a boat through water or to *row* a boat as a sport, e. g. The young people *rowed* past the docks. / As an athlete, he used to *row* for his college.

Words do not exist in isolation and their meanings are defined by contexts and by their relations with each other. Most words have several denotations. Only by knowing the context in which the particular word occurs can we understand what the word means or which specific denotation is intended.

Another type of meaning of a word is its connotative or affective meaning called connotation. In a certain context, the choice of a word may depend on the attitude of the speaker, i. e. on how the speaker feels towards the person(s), thing(s), or action(s) that he/she is talking about. For example, the colloquial words *daddy* and *mammy* are more emotional than *father* and *mother*; *mum* and *dad* are more expressive than *silent* and *move up and down* in particular contexts.

While some words may have similar meanings, they may have different connotations and thus they may not be used interchangeably. These connotations may be positive or negative, e. g.

lean, slim, skinny, slender, thin;

obstinate, tenacious, stubborn, determined, resolute, hard-headed;

complacent, content, satisfied, easy-going, resigned.

It is obvious that contexts and clearly defined meanings are vital in knowing words. Only by seeing words in clear, meaningful contexts can we understand different denotations and connotations. One good contextualized example of a word may be more effective than a long definition or explanation. For example, "*It was so stifling in the room that I could hardly breathe.*" is a better illustration of the meaning of *stifling* than "*It was stifling in the room.*" because it actually defines the meaning of *stifling* with the help of "*that I could hardly breathe*". We should look closely to contexts when trying to understand words or looking up words in the dictionary. (See further discussions about the meanings of English words in Chapters 7 & 8)

Task

We may say that *dawn* denotes “daybreak” or “sunrise”, however, *dawn* may have other meanings or denotations, e. g.

It was the *dawn* of a new era.

The solution began to *dawn* on him.

Write the different denotations of the word *branch*:

branch — of a tree, of a company, of knowledge, ...

Can you write some gradable words in between?

enormous — very big — ... — ... — ... — very small — tiny

So far we have highlighted the word’s major characteristics — the physical structure or the form and the semantic structure or the meaning, which, of course, do not suffice to give a detailed definition of the word. However, all that we have talked about can help us understand how *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* (1998) defines *word*: *a single distinct meaningful element of speech or writing, used with others (or sometimes alone) to form a sentence and typically shown with a space on either side when written or printed*. From the relatively authoritative definition of *word*, we understand the fundamental nature of the word:

Firstly, the word is a unit of speech or writing, which serves the purposeful human communication;

Secondly, the word can be perceived as the total of the sounds that comprise it;

Thirdly, the word, in writing, is seen as a sequence of letters bounded on either side by a blank space;

Fourthly, the word, viewed linguistically, possesses its physical structure (form) and semantic structure (meaning).

1.1.3 Vocabulary

Vocabulary refers to all the words used in a particular kind of work, business, etc. or known to a particular person. *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* (1998) gives the definition of *vocabulary*: * a part of such a body of words used on a particular occasion or in a particular sphere: *the vocabulary of law/* [mass noun] *The term became part of business vocabulary.* * the body of words known to an individual person: *He had a wide vocabulary.* * a list of difficult or unfamiliar words with an explanation of their meanings, accompanying a piece of specialist or foreign-language text. * a range of artistic or stylistic forms, techniques, or movements: *Dance companies have their own vocabularies of movements.* *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (2002) adds the following to the above-mentioned definition: all the words used or produced by a computer program, game, or talking toy: *The program has a vocabulary of 2,500 words.* The *lexis* of the English language may be looked upon as its vocabulary. *Lexis*, a mass noun, is defined as the total stock of words in a language, for example, *a notable loss of English lexis.* *Lexicon* may also mean all the words of a person, language, or branch of knowledge, e. g. *the size of the English vocabulary or lexicon.*

Penny Ur says in his book *A Course in Language Teaching: Practice and Theory* (2000):

Vocabulary can be defined, roughly, as the words we teach in the foreign language. However, a new item of vocabulary may be more than a single word: for example, *post office* and *mother-in-law*, which are made up of two or three words but express a single idea. There are also multi-word idioms such as *call it a day*, where the meaning of the phrase cannot be deduced from an analysis of the component words. A useful convention is to cover all such

cases by talking about vocabulary “items” rather than “words”.

In terms of what is said above, Ur continues to point out that in order to help language learners enlarge their vocabulary, *form (pronunciation and spelling)*, *grammar* and *collocation* need to be taught. It is implied that these three aspects are supposed to be the most important in vocabulary. Vocabulary is central to the learning and the use of the language. As D. A. Wilkins says, “without grammar very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed.”

A typical example of the vocabulary size of English native speakers is shown in *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary* by I. S. P. Nation (1990):

VOCABULARY SIZE OF NATIVE SPEAKERS

Age in years	Vocabulary size	Age in years	Vocabulary size
1.3	235	10.7	7020
2.8	405	11.7	7860
3.8	700	12.8	8700
5.5	1528	13.9	10660
6.5	2500	15.0	12000
8.5	4480	18.0	17600
9.6	6620		

In thinking about the size of the English vocabulary, we should be careful about what sort of vocabulary we are referring to: “the words used by almost every English speaker, the words used by an average person, the words understood by an average person, all the words used by any English speaker, all possible words, whether actually attested or not, the words most often used by many persons, and so on.” (Romaine, 1997) It is estimated by English experts that in Britain an average user of English may have a vocabulary of 50 thousand words, compared with those without higher education whose working vocabulary is about 35 thousand words. However, the well-educated people may need to have a vocabulary size of over 75 thousand words before they could be called “the social elite”.

English and globalization have spread hand in hand throughout the world since the last decades of the 20th century. The process started with the rapid development of the world’s politics, economics, culture, science and technology and continues with the new virtual empire of the Internet. By most common estimates, at the end of the first decade in the 21st century, 400 million people will speak English as a first language, another 300 to 500 million as a fluent second language, and perhaps 750 million as a foreign language. Thus the English language no longer “belongs” to its native speakers in the English-speaking countries and regions but to the whole world. As a phenomenon never seen before, English is spoken in some form by three times as many nonnative speakers as native speakers. Not only Caribbean English, South African English, etc. but also Chinese English, Indian English, etc. are rapidly increasing their share of the English language. The change that is ongoing in present-day English is the easiest to see in its vocabulary, which has grown so much in size. At present, new English words are being coined at the rate of 14.7 words per day, that is, a new word appears every 98 minutes. It was reported by *21st Century English Language Teaching Review* (May 18, 2009) that Global Language Monitor (GLM), Texas U. S. A., had predicted that by the 10th of June, 2009, the millionth

English word would have come into being. Consider the age of William Shakespeare when there were said to be only about 100 thousand words in the English vocabulary that were used by only about 2 million people.

Task

Choose an intensive reading passage, either from a textbook or from other sources. How would you deal with the vocabulary in the passage in order to concentrate upon understanding the content and gradually enlarge your vocabulary?

Firstly, if an unknown word is not essential to understanding the text, nor useful, ignore it.

Secondly, if an unknown word is essential to understanding the text, but not useful, use a synonym or translate it.

Thirdly, if an unknown word is both essential to understanding the text and useful, translate it or give a synonym and later try to learn it by heart.

...

1.2 Understanding Lexicology

1.2.1 What is lexicology?

Let's first take a look at the definitions of lexicology in the dictionaries. *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* (1998) defines lexicology as: [mass noun] *the study of form, meaning, and behaviour of words*. And the explanation of the word's meaning in *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* (2002) is something like *the study of the form and meaning of words*: Now, let's refer to something that people say about *lexicology* on the Internet, e. g. *Lexicology is the branch of linguistics concerned with the study of the vocabulary of a given language. It deals with words, their origin, development, history, structure, meaning and application. In short, it is the study of the signification and application of words* (<http://englishtree.blog.sohu.com/59041573.html>). *Lexicology is the study of word meanings and origins: the branch of linguistics dealing with the use and meanings of words and the relationships between items of vocabulary* (<http://encarta.msn.com>). *English lexicology is the scientific study of English vocabulary. That is to say that English lexicology is not equal to learn the English vocabulary word by word. However, it is a branch of linguistics concerned with the vocabulary of the English language in respect to words and word equivalents* (http://zy.swust.net.cn/06/1/yychx/new_page_chapter%20one.htm).

With the expansion of the area for word studies, lexicology is increasingly associated with not only the structure and meaning of words but also their development including their origin, history, change, their use and learning, and lexicography. Combinations of words in English such as *do the garden*, *see a doctor*, *strong tea* and *a beam / ray of light* can be called collocations, which constitute an indispensable part in English lexicology.

In short, lexicology deals with the issues that go to the meaning and structure of words and other areas of lexical development, i. e. the nature and features of words.

Information Box

lexis: all the words in a language; *lexicon*: the vocabulary of a language;

lexico-: of lexis or lexicon; *-logy*: the science or study of.

Combine "lexico-" and "-logy", and you can have the form of the word "lexicology" and you can also get the meaning of it.

1. 2. 2 Development of English lexicology

Leonard Bloomfield made a successful attempt last century to define the word according to formal rather than semantic criteria, the main concern of which is the relation of the word to the sentence. S. Ullmann pointed out in 1979 in his academic book *Semantics: An Introduction to the Science of Meaning* that the word plays such a crucial part in the structure of language that it is necessary to have a special branch of linguistics to examine it in all its aspects, and that lexicology deals not only with words but also with all types of morphemes entering into the composition of words. S. Ullmann summarized what he had explored: “Lexicology deals by definition with words and word-forming morphemes, that is to say with significant units. It follows that these elements must be investigated both in their form and in their meaning. Lexicology will therefore have two subdivisions: *morphology*, the study of the forms of words and their components, and *semantics*, the study of their meanings.” Since then, the studies of lexicology have been developing steadily with the dimensions of linguistic profundity and scope.

It is the common understanding now that lexicology is concerned with the study of vocabulary of a language and deals with words, their origin, development, history, structure, meaning and application. More comprehensively and precisely, T. McArthur writes in *Oxford Concise Companion to the English Language* (2001): Lexicology is “an area of language study concerned with the nature, meaning, history, and use of words and word elements and often also with the critical description of LEXICOGRAPHY. Although formerly a branch of PHILOLOGY, lexicology is increasingly treated as a branch of LINGUISTICS, associated with such terms as LEXEME, lexical field, lexical item, LEXICON and LEXIS, on the premise that they offer (or could offer, if tightly defined and widely adopted) a more precise and useful basis for the study of language than imprecise terms such as WORD and VOCABULARY.”

H. Jackson and E. Z. Amvela expressed similar ideas a bit earlier in their lexicological book *Words, Meaning and Vocabulary* (2000): “Lexicology deals not only with simple words in all their aspects, but also with complex and compound words, the meaningful units of language. Since these units must be analyzed in respect of both their form and their meaning, lexicology relies on information derived from morphology, the study of the forms of words and their components, and semantics, the study of their meanings. A third field of particular interest in lexicological studies is etymology, the study of the origins of words. However, lexicology must not be confused with lexicography, the writing or compilation of dictionaries, which is a special technique rather than a level of language study.”

At the turn of the 21st century, significant changes took place in the theory and practice of lexicology. Since then, more works of lexicology have come off the press and the journal *Lexicology* has started to be released, which evidently demonstrates the achievement in the lexicological researches throughout the world.

Reading Task

At the beginning of the 20th century, Leonard Bloomfield said that (vocabulary was) “really an appendix of the grammar, a list of basic irregularities”. Decades later, Anna Wierzbicka, however, pointed out that (syntax was) “no more than the glue that is used to paste words together”, emphasizing the importance of lexis in the linguistic studies. We can find the following remarks in *The Linguistics Encyclopedia*, 1991, compiled by Kirsten Malmkjaer: “The study of lexis is the study of the vocabulary of languages in all its aspects: words and their meanings, how words relate to one another, how they may combine with one another, and the relationships between vocabulary and other areas of the description of languages, the phonology, morphology, and syntax.”

1.3 An Introduction to Works of Lexicology

1.3.1 An introduction to *Lexicology: An International Handbook on the Nature and Structure of Words and Vocabulary*

Lexicology: An International Handbook on the Nature and Structure of Words and Vocabulary, edited by D. A. Cruse, F. Hundsnurscher, M. Job & P. R. Lutzeier, was published by Walter de Gruyter in Berlin, Germany in 2002 (Volume I) and 2005 (Volume II). It took editors 12 years (1993 – 2005) to finish compiling the 241 essays contributed by more than 200 senior linguists, scholars and professors. The *Handbook* intends, by providing current scientific achievements of lexicological researches covering various independent linguistic branches such as phonetics, morphology, semantics, syntax, pragmatics, stylistics and interdisciplinary studies of linguistics and psychology from an intercultural perspective, to present the fact that words, as an indispensable component of the linguistic system — a combination of sound, form and meaning — are a most direct and perfect semiotic system reflecting the realistic world.

There are 11 parts (41 chapters altogether) in the whole book:

Part 1 (Chapters 1 – 3) gives a general introduction to lexicology as an independent sub-discipline in linguistics, its basic theories and some fundamental questions of lexical studies.

Part 2 (Chapters 4 – 12) discusses the form level and the content level of a word and their relations. In Chapters 11 and 12 appears the discussion of idioms, abbreviations and other lexical units with a status similar to words.

Part 3 (Chapters 13 – 16) elaborates the principal ideas of lexicological studies — semantic relations from the perspective of paradigmatic relation. Lexical structures in a syntagmatic perspective are also talked about in Chapter 16.

Part 4 (Chapters 17 – 23) focuses on the external structure and pragmatic aspects of the word including word classes, word families, lexical fields, structurings related to concepts, functional varieties, layers of origin and vocabularies for specific purposes.

Part 5 (Chapters 24 – 25) studies the methodology of lexicological research in the macro-perspective and structural properties of vocabularies from contrastive and typological points of view.

Part 6 (Chapters 26 – 28) is about the studies on social and regional diversities of words, mainly on vocabularies of language systems in different societies and on vocabularies of German and English dialects in different countries and regions.

Part 7 (Chapters 29 – 33) introduces synchronic and diachronic researches of words concerning the etymology of words, lexical change, epoch vocabularies and vocabularies of famous personalities in literature, church, music, state and science.

Part 8 (Chapter 34) examines the researches on the contrastive studies of lexical fields, such as kin relations, color and emotion.

Part 9 (Chapters 35 – 37) presents the analysis of lexical units, changing lexical units and the combination of lexical units, explaining the relations between words and grammar.

Part 10 (Chapters 38 – 40) expounds the word meaning from the perspective of psycholinguistics, connectionism, relative theories of mental lexicon, relations between words and the human brain and the acquisition of word meaning.

Part 11 (Chapter 41) is entitled “Lexicology and Neighboring Disciplines” making an