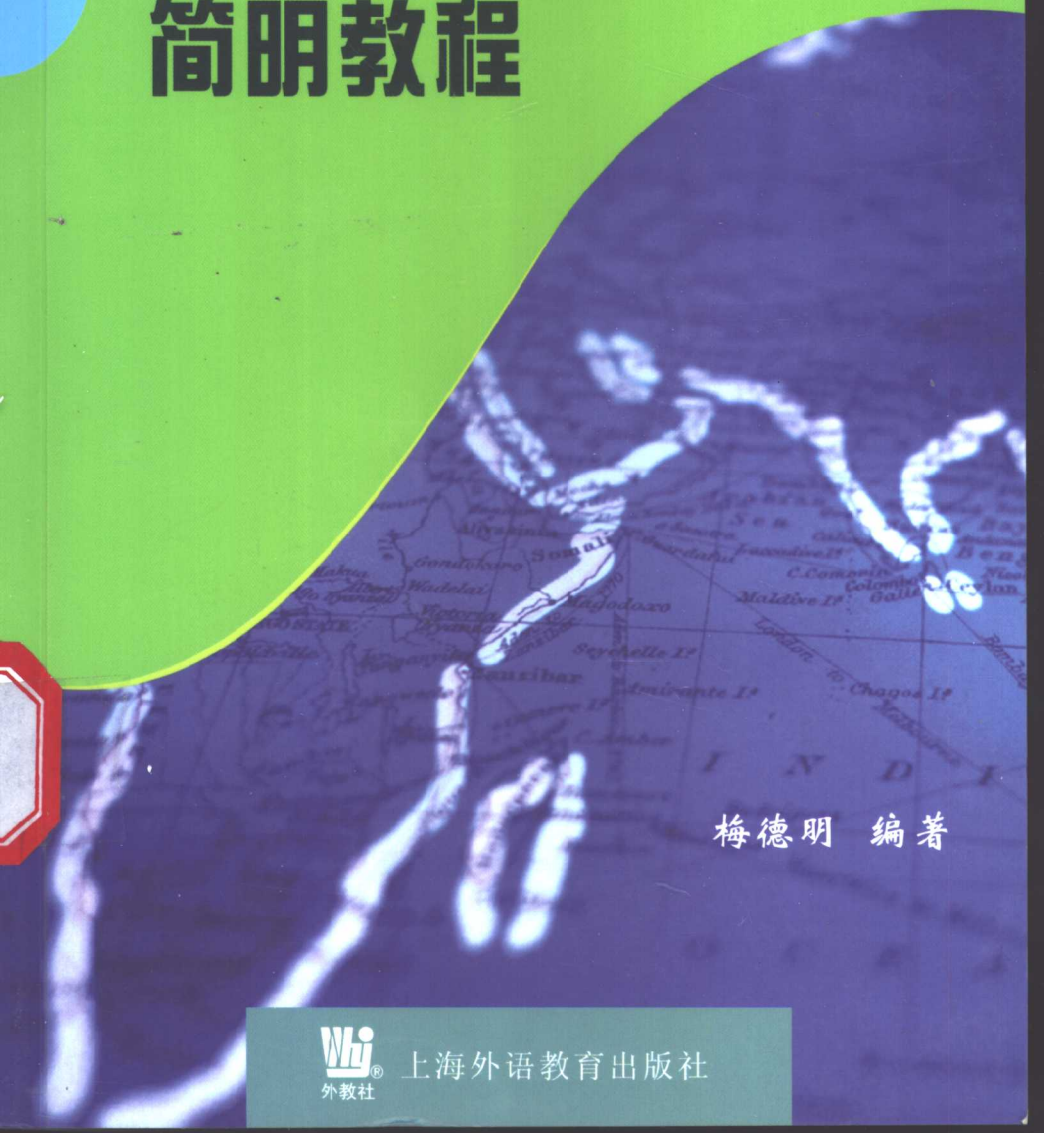
Modern Linguistics
A Concise Course

现代语言学简明教程



梅德明 编著

外教社 上海外语教育出版社

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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

现代语言学简明教程/梅德明编著. - 上海：
上海外语教育出版社，2003
ISBN 7-81080-498-7

Ⅰ. 现… Ⅱ. 梅… Ⅲ. 语言学-高等教育-自学考试-教材-英、汉 Ⅳ. H0

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2002)第 044228 号

出版发行： 上海外语教育出版社
（上海外国语大学内） 邮编：200083
电　　话： 021-65425300（总机），35051812（发行部）
电子邮箱： bookinfo@sflep.com.cn
网　　址： http://www.sflep.com.cn http://www.sflep.com
责任编辑： 吴 狄

印　　刷： 上海江杨印刷厂
经　　销： 新华书店上海发行所
开　　本： 850×1168 1/32 印张 10.125 字数 250 千字
版　　次： 2003 年 5 月第 1 版 2003 年 5 月第 1 次印刷
印　　数： 5 000 册

书　　号： ISBN 7-81080-498-7 / H · 181
定　　价： 15.00 元

本版图书如有印装质量问题，可向本社调换

编 者 的 话

2001 年夏，上海外语音像出版社约我讲授“现代语言学”课程，讲课分为 10 次进行，讲课内容为由何兆熊教授和我两人合编的全国高等教育自学考试英语专业本科段指定教材《现代语言学》。上海外语音像出版社拍摄了这 10 次讲课的实况，并制作成 10 张 VCD 出版，以供全国各地自学考试助学单位和英语专业自考者使用。

为了便于学习者更好地使用这套光盘，提高学习效果，我在何兆熊教授的支持下，将这 10 次讲课内容整理成文字书稿，交付上海外语教育出版社出版。鉴于本书稿与原教程相比更为简明易懂，故将此书定名为《现代语言学简明教程》。

《现代语言学简明教程》对原书进行了全面梳理，简化了部分繁杂的章节，剔除了一些含糊的内容，删去了其中繁冗的表述，更正了若干误印之处，并按需要对某些章节作了适量增补。为了便于使用者理解和检索本书中的语言学专用术语，我们将原书的术语词表改为附有相关章节的索引词表。此外，《现代语言学简明教程》还含有两套符合“现代语言学”全国自考题型要求的模拟考卷，供学习者自测之用。

《现代语言学简明教程》的编写和出版自始至终得到了上海外语教育出版社和上海外语音像出版社的支持，值此教程出版之际，我谨向这两家出版社的总编和责任编辑致以诚挚的谢意。

梅德明

2003 年春于上海外国语大学英语学院

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1 What is linguistics?

1.1 Definition

Linguistics is generally defined as the scientific study of language.

The word *language* preceded by the zero article in English implies that linguistics studies not any particular language, e.g., English, Chinese, Arabic, and Latin, but languages in general.

The word *study* does not mean "learn" but "investigate" or "examine".

The word *scientific* refers to the way in which language is studied.

A scientific study of language is based on the systematic investigation of data, conducted with reference to some general theory of language structure. In order to discover the nature of the underlying language system, what linguists have to do first is to study language facts, i.e., to see how language is actually used; then they formulate some hypotheses about the language

structure. But the hypotheses thus formed have to be checked repeatedly against the observed facts. In linguistics, as in any other discipline, data and theory stand in a dialectical complementation; that is, a theory without the support of data can hardly claim validity, and data without being explained by some theory remain a muddled mass of things.

Thus the process of linguistic study can be summarized as follows: first certain linguistic facts are observed, and generalizations are made about them; next, based on these generalizations, hypotheses are formulated to account for the facts; and then the hypotheses are tested by further observations; and finally a linguistic theory is constructed about what language is and how it works.

The process of linguistic study:

1) linguistic facts observed;
2) generalizations made about the linguistic facts;
3) hypotheses formulated to account for the linguistic facts;
4) the hypotheses tested by further observations;
5) linguistic theories of language constructed.

1.2 The scope of linguistics

The study of language as a whole is often called **general linguistics.** This deals with the **basic concepts, theories, descriptions, models and methods** applicable in any linguistic study, in contrast to those branches of study that relate linguistics to the research of other areas.

Language is a complicated entity with multiple layers and facets, so it is hardly possible for the linguists to deal with it all at once. They have to concentrate on one aspect of it at a time.

What first drew the attention of the linguists were the sounds used in languages. The **study of sounds** used in linguistic communication led to the establishment of a branch of linguistics called **phonetics**.

Then, as linguists became interested in **how sounds are put together and used to convey meaning in communication**, they developed another branch of study related to sounds called **phonology**.

While sounds are primary in linguistic communication, they are represented by certain symbols, i.e., words and even smaller components called morphemes. The study of the way in which these **symbols are arranged to form words** has constituted the branch of study called **morphology**.

The **combination of these words to form permissible sentences** in languages is governed by rules. The study of these rules constitutes a major branch of linguistic studies known as **syntax**.

But the ultimate objective of language is not just to create grammatically well-formed sentences, but to convey meaning. So the **study of meaning** was gradually developed and became known as **semantics**.

Language communication does not occur in a vacuum. It always occurs in a context, i.e., it always occurs at a certain time and place, and between participants with particular intentions. When the study of meaning is conducted, not in isolation, but **in the context of use**, it becomes another branch of lin-

guistic study called **pragmatics**.

Some linguists are particularly concerned with the historical development of languages and the processes involved in language change. The **study of language change** over various periods of time and at various historical stages is known as **historical linguistics**.

The study of all these aspects of language forms the core of linguistics. Then, language is not an isolated phenomenon. Naturally, in the course of time the study of language has established close links with other branches of social studies, resulting in **interdisciplinary branches of linguistic study**.

Language and society are closely connected. The language a person uses often reveals his or her social background, and there exist social norms that determine the type of language to be used on a certain occasion; and language changes are often caused by social changes. The study of all these **social aspects of language and its relation with society** form the core of the branch called **sociolinguistics**.

Psycholinguistics, on the other hand, **relates the study of language to psychology**. It aims to answer such questions as how the human mind works when we use language, how we as infants acquire our mother tongue, how we memorize, and how we process the information we receive in the course of communication.

Findings in linguistic studies can often be applied to the research of how children acquire their native language and adults acquire their second language. The **study of language acquisition** is generally known as **applied linguistics**. In particular, **applied linguistics**

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