

Special English for Sociology

社会学专业英语

马红艳 编著



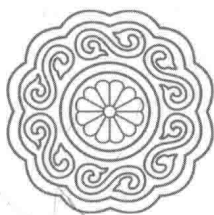
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1. Introduction to Sociology

1. 1. What Is Sociology?

Concerts, sports games, and political rallies can have very large crowds. When someone attends one of these events, they may know only the people they came with. Yet they may experience a feeling of connection to the group. They are one of the crowds. They cheer and applaud when everyone else does. They boo and yell alongside them. They move out of the way when someone needs to get by, and say "excuse me" when they need to leave. They know how to behave in this kind of crowd. It can be a very different experience if this person is traveling in a foreign country and finds themselves in a crowd moving down the street. They may have trouble figuring out what is happening. Is the crowd just the usual morning rush, or is it a political protest of some kind? Perhaps there was some sort of accident or disaster. Is it safe in this crowd, or should they try to extract themselves? How can they find out what is going on? Although they are in it, they may not feel like they are part of this crowd. They may not know what to do or how to behave. Even within one type of crowd, different groups exist and different behaviors are on display. At a rock concert, for example, some may enjoy singing along, others prefer to sit and observe, while still others may join in a mosh pit or try crowd surfing. Why do people feel and act differently in different types of social situations? Why might people of a single group exhibit different behaviors in the same situation? Why might people acting similarly not feel connected to others exhibiting the same behavior? These are some of the many questions sociologists ask as they study people and societies.

The dictionary defines sociology as the systematic study of society and social interaction. The word “sociology” is derived from the Latin word *socius* (companion) and the Greek word *logos* (study of), meaning “the study of companionship.” While this is a starting point for the discipline, sociology is actually much more complex. It uses many different methods to study a wide range of subject matter and to apply these studies to the real world. ①

Sociology emerged as a field of study in the nineteenth century because people discovered that the sociological perspective provided useful insight into problems societies face today. Most importantly, sociology has continued to expand understanding of how societies work and how human behavior is shaped by culture. This understanding is especially significant today due to the fact many people hold fast to their beliefs, values, and behaviors that have been learned from their particular cultural context. With that being said the power of social forces and cultural structures play very important roles in shaping people’s behavior.

Sociology is the study of social life, social change, and the social causes and consequences of human behavior. Sociologists are interested in how groups of people work together as well as how nations of the world relate to one another. When seeing two or more people interacting, sociologists have the tools to study the process of the interaction between them. These interactions can consist of a married couple in conflict or a teacher with students in a classroom situation. It also could be individuals interacting in a group, work, or a sports team setting. Sociology also shares a common bond with other social sciences in the fact that they all are concerned with human behavior in society. These sciences also share the perspective of the scientific method and some of the same data collection methods which are used to study their subject matter. Sociology is the broadest of the social sciences, with its main concern focused on human social behavior.

① *An Introduction to Sociology*, Openstax College, Rice University, 6100 Main Street MS – 380, Houston, Texas 77005, p. 10.

Sociologists study all aspects and levels of society. A society is a group of people whose members interact, reside in a definable area, and share a culture. A culture includes the group's shared practices, values, and beliefs. One sociologist might analyze video of people from different societies as they carry on everyday conversations to study the rules of polite conversation from different world cultures. Another sociologist might interview a representative sample of people to see how texting has changed the way they communicate. Yet another sociologist might study how migration determined the way in which language spread and changed over time. A fourth sociologist might be part of a team developing signs to warn people living thousands of years in the future, and speaking many different languages, to stay away from still-dangerous nuclear waste. ^①

In fact, sociology has been called "the science of common sense" by critics who assume that it merely "proves" what everybody else already knows. Sociology sometimes can confirm what many people already accept. People should not be surprised that scientific research shows that some commonsense beliefs are true, because some people need accurate commonsense knowledge of human behavior to interact with others and function effectively in society. ^②

Sociology can be exciting because it teaches people ways to recognize how they fit into the world and how others perceive them. Looking at themselves and society from a sociological perspective helps people see where they connect to different groups based on the many different ways they classify themselves and how society classifies them in turn. It raises awareness of self identity in society. Sociologists focus their work on suggesting and evaluating solutions to social problems and helping people to improve their lives. The knowledge and skills gained from sociology, provides good preparation for other undergraduates

① *An Introduction to Sociology*, Openstax College, Rice University, 6100 Main Street MS - 380, Houston, Texas 77005, p. 10.

② Thomas J. Sullivan, *Sociology: Concepts and Applications in a Diverse World*, 4th Edition, Prentice Hall Press, 1997, p. 10.

fields such as education, business, nursing and law. Sociology also provides a clearer understanding about relationships, how society runs effectively, and why lives take certain paths.

How Sociologists View Society and Social Structure

The primary job of most sociologists is to teach sociology in colleges and universities. If sociologists were not deeply engaged in learning about the social world and societies, there would be nothing to teach. Another important activity sociologists are to perform is researching questions concerning the social world. All sciences, including sociology, make a distinction between basic science and applied science. The primary focus of basic science is to advance understanding of some phenomenon; whereas, applied social science focuses on solving real-world problems. Both basic and applied sciences are based on observation, but what they do with these observations is quite different. Sociologists penetrate into worlds that had previously been unknown. For example, the world of crime or the world of some bizarre religious sect are areas many sociologist would be interested in pursuing. Many sociologists though would move toward areas that are familiar to him and to most people in his society.

All sociologists are interested in the experiences of individuals and how those experiences are shaped by interactions with social groups and society as a whole. To a sociologist, the personal decisions an individual makes do not exist in a vacuum. Cultural patterns and social forces put pressure on people to select one choice over another. Sociologists try to identify these general patterns by examining the behavior of large groups of people living in the same society and experiencing the same societal pressures. The recent turmoil in the U. S. housing market and the high rate of foreclosures offer an example of how a sociologist might explore social patterns. Owning a home has long been considered an essential part of the American Dream. People often work for years to save for a down payment on what will be the largest investment they ever make. The monthly mortgage is often a person's largest budget item. Missing one or more mortgage payments can result in serious consequences. The lender may foreclose on the mortgage and repossess the property. People

may lose their homes and may not be able to borrow money in the future. Walking away from the responsibility to pay debts is not a choice most people make easily. About three million homes were repossessed in the United States between 2006 and 2011. Experts predict the number could double by 2013 (Levy and GOP 2011). This is a much higher rate than the historical average. What social factors are contributing to this situation, and where might sociologists find patterns? Do Americans view debt, including mortgages, differently than in the past? What role do unemployment rates play? Might a shift in class structure be an influential factor? What about the way major economic players operate?

To answer these questions, sociologists look beyond individual foreclosures at national trends. They will see that in recent years unemployment has been at record highs. They will observe that many lenders approved subprime mortgages with adjustable rates that started low and ballooned. They may look into whether unemployment and lending practices were different for members of different social classes, races, or genders. By analyzing the impact of these external conditions on individuals' choices, sociologists can better explain why people make the decisions they do.

A key basis of the sociological perspective is the concept that the individual and society are inseparable. It is impossible to study one without the other. German sociologist Norbert Elias called the process of simultaneously analyzing the behavior of individuals and the society that shapes that behavior figuration. He described it through a metaphor of dancing. There can be no dance without the dancers, but there can be no dancers without the dance. Without the dancers, a dance is just an idea about motions in a choreographer's head. Without a dance, there is just a group of people moving around a floor. Similarly, there is no society without the individuals that make it up, and there are also no individuals who are not affected by the society in which they live (Elias 1978). An application that makes this concept understandable is the practice of religion. While people experience their religion in a distinctly individual manner, religion exists in a larger social context. For instance, an individual's religious practice may be influenced by

what government dictates, holidays, teachers, places of worship, rituals, and so on. These influences underscore the important relationship between individual practices of religion and social pressures that influence that religious experience. ^①

In their quest to understand society, sociologists' questions always remain essentially the same: What are people doing with each other here? What are their relationships to each other? How are these relationships organized in institutions? What are the collective ideas that move men and institutions? In trying to answer these questions, sociologists will have to deal with economic or political matters, but they will do so in a way rather different from economists or political scientists. They do so through scientific research and practical investigations. As scientists, sociologists try to be objective, controlling personal preferences and prejudices. For the attempt to understand society, methodology helps sociologists in reaching this goal. In order to understand society, sociologists will use a variety of means. By looking at individuals and societies and how they interact through the sociological imagination. Sociologists are able to examine what influences behavior, attitudes, and culture. By applying systematic and scientific methods to this process, they try to do so without letting their own biases and pre-conceived ideas influence their conclusions.

1. 2. History of Sociology

Since ancient times, people have been fascinated by the relationship between individuals and the societies to which they belong. Many of the topics that are central to modern sociological scholarship were studied by ancient philosophers and many of these earlier thinkers were motivated by their desire to describe an ideal society.

^① *An Introduction to Sociology*, Openstax College, Rice University, 6100 Main Street MS - 380, Houston, Texas 77005, p. 11.

In the 13th century, Ma Tuan-Lin, a Chinese historian, first recognized social dynamics as an underlying component of historical development in his seminal encyclopedia, *General Study of Literary Remains*. The next century saw the emergence of the historian some consider to be the world's first sociologist: Ibn Khaldun (1332 – 406) of Tunisia. He wrote about many topics of interest today, setting a foundation for both modern sociology and economics, including a theory of social conflict, a comparison of nomadic and sedentary life, a description of political economy, and a study connecting a tribe's social cohesion to its capacity for power (Hannoum 2003). In the 18th century, Age of Enlightenment philosophers developed general principles that could be used to explain social life. Thinkers such as John Locke, Voltaire, Immanuel Kant, and Thomas Hobbes responded to what they saw as social ills by writing on topics that they hoped would lead to social reform.

The early 19th century saw great changes with the Industrial Revolution, increased mobility, and new kinds of employment. It was also a time of great social and political upheaval with the rise of empires that exposed many people—for the first time—to societies and cultures other than their own. Millions of people were moving into cities and many people were turning away from their traditional religious beliefs. ①

Sociology became a social science in the 1800s and early 1900s as a tool of both understanding and social reform. The nineteenth century French philosopher August Comte is considered the father of sociology because he was the first to coin the term sociology. He argued strongly that society should be studied according to the same scientific methods that were used to understand the natural world. At about the same time, Martineau set the tone for reformist sociology with her sociological work in England. She did research and wrote papers about slavery, colonialism, and the impact of industrialization on women. Early sociologists in the United States were also strongly motivated by a desire to reform society and make life better for its people. For instance, in the early

① *An Introduction to Sociology*, Openstax College, Rice University, 6100 Main Street MS – 380, Houston, Texas 77005, p. 13.

1900s, Albion Small focused his sociological analysis on problems of corruption and poverty in the United States, while Jane Addams concentrated her sociological work on the problem of poor women in the slums of Chicago. Likewise, W. E. B. Du Bois, an African American sociologist, used the sociological view to attack racism and exploitation that African Americans experienced at the hands of whites in the United States and elsewhere in the world. Another American sociologist, E. Franklin Frazier, conducted a famous study of a race riot in Harlem in 1935 that was a considerable advance over the understanding of such riots at the time.

Comte originally studied to be an engineer, but later became a pupil of social philosopher Claude Henri de Rouvroy. They both thought that society could be studied using the same scientific methods utilized in natural sciences. Comte also believed in the potential of social scientists to work toward the betterment of society. He held that once scholars identified the laws that governed society, sociologists could address problems such as poor education and poverty (Abercrombie et al. 2000). Comte named the scientific study of social patterns positivism. He described his philosophy in a series of books called *The Course in Positive Philosophy* (1830 – 1842) and *A General View of Positivism* (1848). He believed that using scientific methods to reveal the laws by which societies and individuals interact would usher in a new “positivist” age of history. While the field and its terminology have grown, sociologists still believe in the positive impact of their work.

Karl Marx (1818 – 1883) was a German philosopher and economist. In 1848 he and Friedrich Engels (1820 – 1895) coauthored *the Communist Manifesto*. This book is one of the most influential political manuscripts in history. It also presents Marx’s theory of society, which differed from what Comte proposed. Marx rejected Comte’s positivism. He believed that societies grew and changed as a result of the struggles of different social classes over the means of production. At the time he was developing his theories, the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism led to great disparities in wealth between the owners of the factories and workers. Capitalism, an economic system characterized by private or corporate ownership of goods and the means to

produce them, grew in many nations. Marx predicted that inequalities of capitalism would become so extreme that workers would eventually revolt. This would lead to the collapse of capitalism, which would be replaced by communism. Communism is an economic system under which there is no private or corporate ownership; everything is owned communally and distributed as needed. Marx believed that communism was a more equitable system than capitalism. While his economic predictions may not have come true in the time frame he predicted, Marx's idea that social conflict leads to change in society is still one of the major theories used in modern sociology. ^①

Creating Discipline

In 1873, English philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820 – 1903) published *The Study of Sociology*, the first book with the term “sociology” in the title. Spencer rejected much of Comte's philosophy as well as Marx's theory of class struggle and his support of communism. Instead, he favored a form of government that allowed market forces to control capitalism. His work influenced many early sociologists including Émile Durkheim (1858 – 1917).

Durkheim helped establish sociology as a formal academic discipline by establishing the first European department of sociology at the University of Bordeaux in 1895 and by publishing his *Rules of the Sociological Method* in 1895. In another important work, *Division of Labors in Society* (1893), Durkheim laid out his theory on how societies transformed from a primitive state into a capitalist, industrial society. According to Durkheim, people rise to their proper level in society based on merit. Durkheim believed that sociologists could study objective “social facts” (Poggi 2000). He also believed that through such studies it would be possible to determine if a society was “healthy” or “pathological”. He saw healthy societies as stable, while pathological societies experienced a breakdown in social norms between individuals and society. In 1897, Durkheim attempted to demonstrate the effectiveness of his rules of social

^① An Introduction to Sociology, Openstax College, Rice University, 6100 Main Street MS – 380, Houston, Texas 77005, p. 14.

research when he published a work titled *Suicide*. Durkheim examined suicide statistics in different police districts to research differences between Catholic and Protestant communities. He attributed the differences to socio-religious forces rather than to individual or psychological causes.

Prominent sociologist Max Weber (1864 – 1920) established a sociology department in Germany at the Ludwig Maximilians University of Munich in 1919. Weber wrote on many topics related to sociology including political change in Russia and social forces that affect factory workers. He is known best for his 1904 book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. The theory that Weber sets forth in this book is still controversial. Some believe that Weber was arguing that the beliefs of many Protestants, especially Calvinists, led to the creation of capitalism. Others interpret it as simply claiming that the ideologies of capitalism and Protestantism are complementary. Weber also made a major contribution to the methodology of sociological research. Along with other researchers such as Wilhelm Dilthey (1833 – 1911) and Heinrich Rickert (1863 – 1936), Weber believed that it was difficult if not impossible to use standard scientific methods to accurately predict the behavior of groups as people hoped to do. They argued that the influence of culture on human behavior had to be taken into account. This even applied to the researchers themselves, who, they believed, should be aware of how their own cultural biases could influence their research. To deal with this problem, Weber and Dilthey introduced the concept of *verstehen*, a German word that means to understand in a deep way. In seeking *verstehen*, outside observers of a social world—an entire culture or a small setting—attempt to understand it from an insider's point of view.

In his book *The Nature of Social Action* (1922), Weber described sociology as striving to “interpret the meaning of social action and thereby give a causal explanation of the way in which action proceeds and the effects it produces.” He and other like-minded sociologists proposed a philosophy of anti-positivism whereby social researchers would strive for subjectivity as they worked to represent social processes, cultural norms, and societal values. This approach led to some research methods whose aim was not to generalize or

predict (traditional in science), but to systematically gain an in depth understanding of social worlds. ^①

Sociology had secured its position in society by the 1970s. Many sociologists were ready to give renewed emphasis to issues and the practical uses of sociology. Today the discipline exhibits more of a balance between what have come to be called basic and applied sociology.

1. 3. Theoretical Perspectives

Sociologists study social events, interactions, and patterns. They then develop theories to explain why these occur and what can result from them. In sociology, a theory is a way to explain different aspects of social interactions and to create testable propositions about society (Allan 2006) . For example, early in the development of sociology, Émile Durkheim was interested in explaining the social phenomenon of suicide. He gathered data on large groups of people in Europe who had ended their lives. When he analyzed the data, he found that suicide rates differed among groups with different religious affiliations. For example, the data showed that Protestants were more likely to commit suicide than Catholics.

To explain this, Durkheim developed the concept of social solidarity. Social solidarity described the social ties that bind a group of people together such as kinship, shared location, or religion. Durkheim combined these concepts with the data he analyzed to propose a theory that explained the religion-based differences in suicide rates. He suggested that differences in social solidarity between the two groups corresponded to the differences in suicide rates. Although some have disagreed with his methods and his conclusions, Durkheim's work shows the importance of theory in sociology. Proposing theories supported by data gives sociologists a way to explain social patterns and to posit cause-and-effect

^① *An Introduction to Sociology*, Openstax College, Rice University, 6100 Main Street MS - 380, Houston, Texas 77005, p. 15.