



外语·文化·教学论丛

A Contrastive Study of English and Chinese Languages from
the Perspective of Cultural Discourse

文化话语视角下的 英汉语言对比研究

◎ 吴越民 著



ZHEJIANG UNIVERSITY PRESS
浙江大学出版社



外语·文化·教学论丛

A Contrastive Study of English and Chinese Languages from
the Perspective of Cultural Discourse

文化话语视角下的 英汉语言对比研究

◎ 吴越民 著



ZHEJIANG UNIVERSITY PRESS
浙江大学出版社

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

文化话语视角下的英汉语言对比研究: 英文/吴越民著. —杭州: 浙江大学出版社, 2015.4
ISBN 978-7-308-14503-9

I. ①文… II. ①吴… III. ①对比语言学—英语、汉语 IV. ①H31 ②H1

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2015) 第 057457 号

文化话语视角下的英汉语言对比研究

吴越民 著

-
- | | |
|-------|--|
| 责任编辑 | 诸葛勤 |
| 封面设计 | 刘依群 |
| 出版发行 | 浙江大学出版社
(杭州市天目山路 148 号 邮政编码 310007)
(网址: http://www.zjupress.com) |
| 排 版 | 杭州金旭广告有限公司 |
| 印 刷 | 浙江良渚印刷厂 |
| 开 本 | 710mm×1000mm 1/16 |
| 印 张 | 19.25 |
| 字 数 | 519 千 |
| 版 印 次 | 2015 年 4 月第 1 版 2015 年 4 月第 1 次印刷 |
| 书 号 | ISBN 978-7-308-14503-9 |
| 定 价 | 48.00 元 |
-

版权所有 翻印必究 印装差错 负责调换

浙江大学出版社发行部联系方式 (0571)88925591; <http://zjdxcbbs.tmall.com>

Preface

Language is the principal means whereby we conduct our social lives. When it is used in social contexts of communication, it is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways. Language does more than representing elements of a culture and it also models culture by expressing, embodying and symbolizing cultural reality. Culture is a wider system that completely includes language as a subsystem. Language can't exist and will lose its meaning and significance without culture as culture provides soil for it to grow and develop. It is self-evident that cultural learning has to take place as an integral part of language learning, and vice versa. The mere acquisition of information about a foreign country, without the psychological demands of integrated language and culture learning, is inadequate as a basis for education through foreign language teaching.

The relation of language to culture is that of part to whole. Language provides a useful link between inner thought and public behavior. Cultures are systems of symbols, and language is only one of the symbolic systems in this network. Language is the stimulus of culture. Culture is the motive force of language. In return, a flourished language can promote the development of culture. In brief, language and culture are interdependent and can promote each other. Being an intrinsic part of culture, language carries culture, mirrors culture, spreads culture and helps develop culture.

This book intends to explore the cultural factors embodied in language and present a contrastive study of English and Chinese languages and cultures from the perspective of cultural discourse. It analyzes languages through cultural phenomena, studying how language shapes the reality in which culture influences people's thinking patterns and behavior. Meanwhile, it also expounds culture through linguistic structures, using language as a medium to introduce culture. It is a comparative study of cultural differences from the perspective of different levels of language, namely, vocabulary, syntax and text as well. The vocabulary of a language reflects what we need to know to cope with the environment and the patterns of different cultures. The syntax and text of language gently push us to notice particular kinds of things in the world and to label them in particular ways. All of these components of language create habitual response patterns to the people, events, and

messages that surround us. Our language intermingles with other aspects of our culture to reinforce the cultural patterns we are taught. In this way we provide illuminating insights into the national cultural psychology reflected in linguistic phenomena and make a comparison of differences and similarities between English and Chinese languages.

Discourse as a field of study includes many different aspects of language use. Its value lies in its emphasis on process and interaction, either a text or set of texts produced by interaction or the rules which allow that to happen. Above all, discourse is a matter of the way in which things said are embedded in the social world. The purpose of such studies of discourse is to understand how the language we use is based on the social environments in which we use that language. In recent years the study of discourse has been extended to include literary discourse and whole fields of culture and symbolic systems. Discourse studies have largely gone beyond the study of texts alone to the study of the broad social discourses and social practices which are realized in and through specific texts. Developments in the study of cultural discourse in such diverse disciplines as intercultural communication, cognitive psychology, social psychology, micro-sociology, ideology, semiotics, and ethnography have shown that discourse is not simply an isolated grammatical or textual structure. Rather it is a complex communicative event that also embodies a social context. This book adopts the contemporary theory of cultural discourse analysis to make comparative analysis of language and culture between English and Chinese. We foreground language use as social practice to explain how social and cultural systems are reflected through language.

Semiotics, also called semiotic studies, is the study of signs and sign processes, indication, designation, likeness, analogy, metaphor, symbolism, signification, and communication. Semiotics is closely related to the field of linguistics, which, for its part, studies the structure and meaning of language more specifically. In examining the ways in which signs operate within a culture, semiotics proceeds from the premise that all aspects of that culture can be regarded as systems of signs. This book also does research on the comparison of English and Chinese languages from the perspective of cultural semiotics. It seeks to understand how language as a symbolic system encodes a nation's culture and on the whole reflects the nation's world view and thinking patterns, how language is made meaningful and how meaning can be communicated in society. It analyzes the pragmatic functions and their influence on lexical cultural connotations from the dimensions such as phonetics, language signs, origins of words and syntax. It also compares the cultural meanings of words in terms of five representative forms: conceptual meaning, associative meaning, idiomatic meaning, meaning related to allusions and rhetorical devices. Associative meanings are therefore not simply produced by the markers of the image, but

activated from an already existing cultural system. Hence, knowing the surface meanings of the symbols is not enough. We need to understand the cultural symbols underpinning cultural values, beliefs, assumptions and norms of behavior patterns. We also need to explore the deep meanings so as to have a more rounded picture of the culture.

This book adopts the interdisciplinary research methodology including sociology, anthropology, cultural semantics, cultural linguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, translation studies, lexicology, rhetoric and intercultural communication, etc. making a study of the differences and similarities of thinking patterns, language expressions, communication and interpretation which are shaped in particular cultural, social and historical backgrounds. We focus our research on Chinese and Western cultures such as Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism in Chinese culture and ancient Roman culture, ancient Greek culture and Christianity in Western culture as well as Chinese and Western philosophy. Through the comparison of different cultures, we analyze their influence on the rational, abstract thinking patterns in English culture and emotional, concrete thinking modes in Chinese culture and the cultural influence on word building, semantic rules, grammatical features, textual structure and intercultural communication.

The book consists of eleven chapters:

Chapter 1 is a brief introduction of language and culture, the components and characteristics of language, the components and characteristics of culture, basic concepts and terms related to culture, and the relationship between language and culture.

Chapter 2 explains the basic concepts of discourse, language and discourse, cultural discourse, and cultural semiotics, sign system (verbal signs, visual signs, characteristics of signs), cultural semiotics, codes, symbols and semiotic analysis.

Chapter 3 discusses cultural semantics, word meanings, contexts, social contexts and cultural contexts, elaborating on the five forms reflecting cultural semantics: words with basically the same conceptual and associative meanings; different words conveying the same cultural meanings; same words conveying different associative meanings; words with surface similarity but actual semantic differences; lexical gaps in different cultural contexts.

Chapter 4 expounds the relationship between animal terms and culture, the relationship between plant terms and culture, analyzing how animals and plants have become a kind of symbolism in people's thinking, and how this symbolism is reflected in the language.

Chapter 5 illustrates the relationship between colors and culture, the relationship between numbers and culture, discussing how language expressions with colors and numbers and the associative meanings vary from country to country.

Chapter 6 compares the differences of grammatical features and textual structure between English and Chinese languages, exploring the cultural differences behind these linguistic phenomena.

Chapter 7 is an analysis of rhetoric devices focusing on the comparison of similes and metaphors between English and Chinese, as well as translation and culture including translation principles, literal translation, image transfer and cultural translation.

Chapter 8 is a study of how cultural factors such as religion, literary works, geographical environments, different values and viewpoints exert influence on English and Chinese idioms and proverbs.

Chapter 9 illustrates the relationship between allusions and culture, such as allusions from literature, history, mythology, legends, sports, etc., making a contrastive analysis of English and Chinese allusions, and the relationship between euphemisms and culture.

Chapter 10 aims at the analysis of the relationship between taboos and culture, such as verbal taboos and behavioral taboos in different cultural contexts, studying the relationship between sexism and culture, sexist language in English and Chinese and cultural elements.

Chapter 11 does research on advertising and culture, such as the development of advertisements, the linguistic features of English and Chinese advertising, brand names, logos and cultural connotations, cultural differences in Western and Chinese advertising. It is followed by the glossary (index of important terms) of phrases, terms, and concepts commonly used in language and culture.

The whole book written in English intends for teachers and students in colleges and universities, foreign-related staff and those who are interested in language and culture and who are proficient in English.

Wu Yuemin

April 10, 2015

Contents

Chapter 1 Language and Culture	1
1.1 Language.....	1
1.1.1 The Definition of Language.....	1
1.1.2 The Components of Language.....	2
1.1.3 The Characteristics of Language.....	5
1.2 Culture.....	12
1.2.1 The Definition of Culture.....	12
1.2.2 The Components of Culture.....	14
1.2.3 The Characteristics of Culture.....	14
1.2.4 The Elements of Cultural Patterns.....	18
1.2.5 High-context and Low-context Cultural Patterns.....	21
1.2.6 Culture and Related Terms.....	25
1.3 Relationship between Language and Culture.....	30
1.3.1 Language Is Part of Culture.....	30
1.3.2 Language Is the Carrier and Container of Culture.....	31
1.3.3 Language Is Strongly Influenced and Shaped by Culture.....	31
1.3.4 Language Exerts Its Influence on Culture.....	32
1.3.5 Language and Culture Influence and Shape Each Other.....	33
Chapter 2 Discourse and Semiotics	34
2.1 Discourse.....	34
2.1.1 The Definition of Discourse.....	34
2.1.2 Language and Discourse.....	35
2.1.3 The Definition of Discourse Analysis.....	37
2.1.4 Cultural Discourse.....	39
2.2 Semiotics.....	41
2.2.1 The Definition of Semiotics.....	41
2.2.2 Sign Systems.....	42
2.2.3 Cultural Semiotics.....	45
2.2.4 Codes.....	46
2.2.5 Symbols.....	47

2.2.6	Semiotic Analysis.....	51
Chapter 3	Semantics and Contexts.....	54
3.1	Semantics.....	54
3.1.1	Word Meanings	55
3.1.2	Conceptual Meanings and Associative Meanings	60
3.2	Contexts.....	62
3.2.1	Social Contexts	64
3.2.2	Cultural Contexts	65
3.3	Semantic Differences.....	66
3.3.1	Words with Basically the Same Conceptual and Associative Meanings	68
3.3.2	Different Words Conveying the Same Cultural Meanings	68
3.3.3	Same Words Conveying Different Associative Meanings.....	69
3.3.4	Words with Surface Similarity but Actual Semantic Differences.....	73
3.3.5	Lexical Gaps in Different Cultures	74
Chapter 4	Animals and Plants.....	77
4.1	Animals	77
4.1.1	Dog (狗).....	79
4.1.2	Fish (鱼).....	80
4.1.3	Sheep (羊).....	82
4.1.4	Horse (马).....	83
4.1.5	Lion (狮).....	84
4.1.6	Tiger (虎).....	85
4.1.7	Cattle (牛).....	86
4.1.8	Rabbit (兔).....	88
4.1.9	Tortoise (龟).....	89
4.1.10	Owl (猫头鹰).....	90
4.1.11	Bat (蝙蝠).....	92
4.1.12	Crane (仙鹤).....	92
4.1.13	Magpie (喜鹊).....	93
4.2	Plants.....	94
4.2.1	Rose (玫瑰).....	94
4.2.2	Plum (梅), Orchid (兰), Bamboo (竹) and Chrysanthemum (菊)	95
4.2.3	Pine (松).....	97
4.2.4	Bodhi Tree (菩提树).....	98
4.2.5	Lotus (莲花, 荷花).....	98
4.2.6	Apple (苹果).....	99

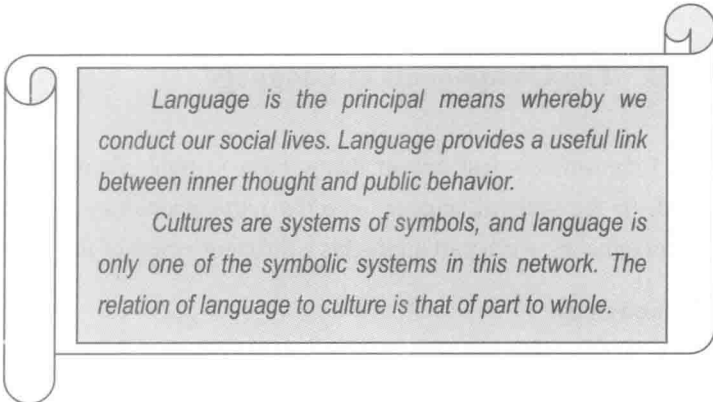
4.2.7	Peach (桃)	101
4.2.8	Willow (柳)	102
Chapter 5	Colors and Numbers	104
5.1	Colors	104
5.1.1	Red (红)	106
5.1.2	White (白)	111
5.1.3	Black (黑)	113
5.1.4	Green (绿)	115
5.1.5	Yellow (黄)	117
5.1.6	Blue (蓝)	119
5.1.7	Grey (灰)	120
5.1.8	Pink (粉红)	120
5.1.9	Purple (紫)	121
5.2	Numbers	121
5.2.1	One (一)	122
5.2.2	Two (二)	123
5.2.3	Three (三)	123
5.2.4	Four (四)	130
5.2.5	Five (五)	134
5.2.6	Six (六)	137
5.2.7	Seven (七)	138
5.2.8	Eight (八)	139
5.2.9	Nine (九)	140
5.2.10	Ten (十)	141
5.2.11	Thirteen (十三)	142
Chapter 6	Grammar and Text	144
6.1	Grammar	144
6.1.1	Morphemes	145
6.1.2	Syntactical Rules	147
6.1.3	Explicit Grammar and Implicit Grammar	149
6.1.4	Subjects and Objects	150
6.1.5	Paratactic and Hypotactic Relations	151
6.1.6	Branching and Linear Sentence Patterns	152
6.1.7	Word Order	153
6.1.8	Cultural Differences behind Grammar	154
6.2	Text	156

6.2.1	The Definition of Text.....	157
6.2.2	Cohesion and Coherence.....	157
6.2.3	Textual Connectives.....	158
6.2.4	Textual Structures.....	162
6.2.5	Cultural Differences behind Text.....	166
Chapter 7	Simile and Metaphor.....	172
7.1	Simile.....	172
7.1.1	The Definition of Simile.....	173
7.1.2	Cultural-alike Associations in English and Chinese Similes.....	174
7.1.3	Cultural-distinct Associations in English and Chinese Similes.....	175
7.2	Metaphor.....	177
7.2.1	The Definition of Metaphor.....	177
7.2.2	Cultural Metaphors.....	178
7.2.3	Cultural-alike Associations in English and Chinese Metaphors.....	181
7.2.4	Cultural-distinct Associations in English and Chinese Metaphors.....	182
7.3	Translation.....	184
7.3.1	Literal Translation.....	185
7.3.2	Cultural Translation.....	188
Chapter 8	Idioms and Proverbs.....	191
8.1	Idioms.....	191
8.1.1	Cultural Similarities between Chinese and English Idioms.....	193
8.1.2	Cultural Disparities between Chinese and English Idioms.....	193
8.2	Proverbs.....	197
8.2.1	Some Equivalent Proverbs in English and Chinese.....	198
8.2.2	Proverbs Related to Different Religions.....	198
8.2.3	Proverbs Derived from Literary Works.....	201
8.2.4	Proverbs Originating from Geographical Environments.....	202
8.2.5	Proverbs Reflecting Values and Viewpoints.....	204
Chapter 9	Allusions and Euphemisms.....	214
9.1	Allusions.....	214
9.1.1	Allusions from Literature.....	215
9.1.2	Allusions from History.....	220
9.1.3	Allusions from Mythology and Legends.....	221
9.1.4	Allusions from Sports.....	225
9.1.5	The Contrastive Analysis of English and Chinese Allusions.....	227

9.2 Euphemisms	228
9.2.1 To Avoid Taboos.....	229
9.2.2 To Show Politeness	233
9.2.3 To Conceal Truth.....	236
Chapter 10 Taboos and Sexism	239
10.1 Taboos	239
10.1.1 The Definition of Taboo	240
10.1.2 Verbal Taboos in Different Cultures.....	240
10.1.3 Nonverbal Taboos in Different Cultures	245
10.2 Sexism	249
10.2.1 Sexist Language in English	250
10.2.2 Sexist Language in Chinese	257
Chapter 11 Advertising and Culture	261
11.1 The Definition of Advertising.....	261
11.2 The Development of Advertising.....	262
11.2.1 The Evolution of Western Advertising	262
11.2.2 Chinese Economic Reform and Advertising	264
11.3 The Techniques of Advertising.....	266
11.4 The Linguistic Features of Advertising.....	267
11.4.1 Phonetic Features of Advertisements	268
11.4.2 Lexical Features of Advertisements	269
11.4.3 Rhetorical Devices of Advertisements	271
11.5 Brand Names	274
11.5.1 Brand Names and Cultural Connotations	275
11.5.2 Coinages in English and Chinese Brand Names.....	276
11.5.3 Exotic Flavor in English and Chinese Brand Names.....	276
11.5.4 Cultural Connotations in English and Chinese Brand Names	277
11.6 Logos	278
11.7 Cultural Differences in English and Chinese Advertising.....	280
11.7.1 Advertising Legislations in Different Cultures.....	280
11.7.2 Family Image in Chinese Advertisements	281
11.7.3 Authoritative Worship and Factual Proofs	282
11.7.4 Collective Orientation and Individualistic Centeredness.....	283
Glossary (Index of Important Terms)	286
Bibliography	294

Chapter 1

Language and Culture



Language is the principal means whereby we conduct our social lives. Language provides a useful link between inner thought and public behavior.

Cultures are systems of symbols, and language is only one of the symbolic systems in this network. The relation of language to culture is that of part to whole.

1.1 Language

1.1.1 The Definition of Language

Language is related to the Latin “*lingua*”, a tongue, human speech with its grammar, vocabulary and sound systems which involve a massive learning task for all language learners, plus all the mysterious knowledge which make communication possible.

Language is the system of human communication which consists of the structural arrangement of sounds or their written representation into large units, e.g. morphemes, words, sentences, utterances. Words are the central elements in language, and they are pronounced in certain ways and combined in certain ways to communicate ideas.

Language refers to any particular system of human communication, for example, the French language, the Hindi language. Sometimes a language is spoken by most people in a particular country, for example, Japanese in Japan, but sometimes a language is spoken by

only part of the population of a country, for example, Tamil in India, French in Canada. Languages are usually not spoken in exactly the same way from one part of a country to another. Differences in the way a language is spoken by different people are described in terms of regional and social variations.

Language also can be defined as the abstract categories of meaning associated with words and the abstract categories of sound (phonemes) that in sequences constitute the formal representations of words, as well as the phonological rules for combining phonemes in acceptable sequences and the syntactic rules for combining words in grammatical sentences. Language is thus inseparable from us as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world.

1.1.2 The Components of Language

Linguistics is just one of many ways to think about language. Linguists generally divide up the study of language into five parts: phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax, and pragmatics. Each part highlights a different aspect of the way that language works.

1) Phonology

When you listen to someone who speaks a language other than your own, you will often hear different (some might even say “strange”) sounds. Phonology is the study of the sound system of language, how words are pronounced, which units of sounds (phonemes) are meaningful for a specific language, and which sounds are universal. Because different language use different sounds, it is often difficult for non-native speakers to learn how to pronounce some sounds.

The basic sound units of a language are called phonemes, and the rules for combining phonemes constitute the phonology of a language. Examples of phonemes in English include the sounds you make when speaking.

The phonological rules of a language tell speakers which sounds to use and how to order them. For instance, the word “cat” has three phonemes: a hard /k/ sound, the short /æ/ vowel, and the /t/ sound. These same three sounds, or phonemes, can be rearranged to form other combinations: “act”, “tack”, or even “tka”. Of course, as someone who speaks and writes English, your knowledge of the rules for creating appropriate combinations of phonemes undoubtedly suggests to you that “tka” is improper. Interestingly, you know that “tks” is incorrect even though you probably cannot describe the rules that make it so.

Languages have different numbers of phonemes. English, for example, depends on

about 45 phonemes. The number of phonemes in other languages ranges from as few as 15 to as many as 85. Mastery of another language requires practice in reproducing its sounds accurately. Sometimes, it is difficult to hear the distinctions in the sounds made by those proficient in the language. Even when the differences can be heard, the mouths and tongues of those learning another language are sometimes unable to produce these sounds. In intercultural communication, imperfect rendering of the phonology of a language can make it difficult to be understood accurately.

2) Morphology

Linguistic units that have a meaning but contain no smaller meaningful parts are termed morphemes. To put it differently, a morpheme is the smallest contrastive unit of grammar. The search for such units in a particular language is called morphemic analysis. And the study of word structure, including classification of morphemes and interrelationships among morphemes, is referred to as morphology.

Phonemes combine to form morphemes, which are the smallest units of meaning in a language. The 45 English phonemes can be used to generate more than 50 million morphemes. For instance, the word “comfort”, whose meaning refers to a state of ease and contentment, contains one morpheme. But the word “comforted” contains two morphemes: comfort and -ed. The latter is a suffix that means that the comforting action or activity happened in the past. Indeed, though all words contain at least one morpheme, some words (such as uncomfortable, which has three morphemes) can contain two or more. Note that morphemes refer only to meaning units. Though the word “comfort” contains smaller words such as “or” or “fort”, these other words are coincidental to the basic meaning of comfort.

3) Semantics

Semantics is the study of meaning—that is, how words communicate the meaning we intend to get across in our communication. We can see the semantics of a language in action when a baby is being taught to name the parts of the body. Someone skilled in the language points to and touches the baby’s nose and simultaneously vocalizes the word “nose”. Essentially, the baby is being taught the vocabulary of a language. Competent communication in any language requires knowledge of the words needed to express ideas. We have probably experienced the frustration of trying to describe an event but not being able to think of words that accurately convey the intended meaning.

The emphasis in semantics is on the generation of meaning, focusing on a single word. For example, what is a chair? Do we define chair by its shape? Does a throne count as a

chair? Do we define it by its function? If I sit on a table, does that make it a chair?

4) Syntax

The fourth component of language is syntactic, the relationship of words to one another. When children are first learning how to combine words into phrases, they are being introduced to the syntactic of their language. Each language stipulates the correct way to arrange words. In English it is not acceptable to create a sentence such as the following: "On by the book desk door is the the." It is incorrect to place the preposition "by" immediately following the preposition "on". Instead, each preposition must have an object, which results in phrases such as "on the desk" and "by the door". Similarly, articles such as "the" in a sentence are not to be presented one right after the other. Instead, the article is placed near the noun, which produces a sentence that includes "the book", "the door", and "the desk". The syntactic of English grammar suggests that the words in the preceding nonsense sentence might be rearranged to form the grammatically correct sentence "The book is on the desk by the door." The order of the words helps establish the meaning of the utterance.

So syntax is the study of the structure, or grammar of a language and the rules for combining words into meaningful sentences. One way to think of syntax is to consider how the order of the words in a sentence creates a particular meaning. Word order in the sentence "The red car smashed into the blue car" makes a big difference in the meaning of the sentence. "The blue car smashed into the red car" means something else entirely. Each language has a set of rules that govern the sequence of the words. To learn another language we must learn those rules.

5) Pragmatics

The final component of all verbal codes is pragmatics, the effect of language on human perceptions and behaviors. The study of pragmatics focuses on how language is actually used. A pragmatic analysis of language goes beyond phonology, morphology, semantics, and syntax. Instead, it considers how users of a particular language are able to understand the meanings of specific utterances in particular contexts. By learning the pragmatics of language use, we understand how to participate in a conversation and we know how to sequence the sentences we speak as part of a conversation. For example, when we are eating a meal with a group of people and somebody says, "Is there any salt?" we know that we should give the person the salt shaker rather than simply answer "yes."

Thus, pragmatics is the study of how meaning is constructed in relation to receivers, how language is actually used in particular contexts in language communities. For example,

if someone said, “That’s a lovely outfit,” we might interpret it variously depending upon the intonation, our relationship with the speaker, and so on. The person might be mocking the outfit or flirting with you. Or the comment could simply be a compliment. The meaning does not come from the words or the word order alone.

The rules governing the pragmatics of a language are firmly embedded in the larger rules of the culture and are intimately associated with the cultural patterns. Cultures vary in the degree to which they encourage people to ask direct questions and to make direct statements. Imagine a student from the United States who speaks some Chinese and who subsequently goes to China as an exchange student. The U.S. American’s culturally learned tendency is to deal with problems directly, and he may therefore confront his Chinese roommate about the latter’s habits in order to “clear the air” and establish an “open” relationship. Given the Chinese cultural preference for indirectness and face-saving behaviors, the U.S. American student’s skill in Chinese does not extend to the pragmatics of language use. These differences in the pragmatic rule systems of languages also make it very difficult to tell a joke—or even to understand a joke—in a second language. Humor requires a subtle knowledge of both the expected meanings of the words and their intended effects.

1.1.3 The Characteristics of Language

1) Language Is Systematic

It means that language is rule governed. Elements in it are arranged according to certain rules. Some combinations are disallowed in either the formation of words or construction of sentences. That’s why we have “help” but not “ehlp”, we can say “He is a student.”, but “Is a student he?” is not an acceptable sentence.

In English, a syllable is the smallest unit. Scores of syllables become the carriers of words. With thousands of words we form sentences and discourses. This system makes human language creative and potential to produce endless sets of sentences according to different contexts.

Chinese characters may look confusing, but they are organized and structured according to well-defined rules. Each Chinese character represents a monosyllabic Chinese word or morpheme. Each character is based on one of 214 “偏旁” (radicals) —the basic elements of the Chinese writing system. Radicals form the building blocks of Chinese characters. Some radicals can be used as both building blocks and independent characters, but others are never used independently. Chinese characters are classified into six