

英语专业“十三五”规划应用型专业建设系列丛书

总主编 马道山

语言学概论

An Introduction to Linguistics

马道山 ◎ 著



汕头大学出版社

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Introduction

There have been many textbooks already published and well claimed in China, some of them were published much earlier and have been very influential ever since, such as *Essentials of English Linguistics*, compiled by Li Yanfu (1987), published by Shandong University Press; *An Introduction to Linguistics in Chinese* by Qi Yucun (1985), published by Shanghai Foreign Education Press; *Linguistics: A Course Book* by Hu Zhuanglin, Liu Runqing and Li Yanfu (1987), published by Beijing University Press; *A Concise Textbook of English Linguistics*, by Dai Weidong and He Zhaoxiong (2002), published by Shanghai Foreign Education Press.

Undoubtedly these textbooks have brought great convenience to the readers of English language, and set up a solid foundation for the language learners. Different from the above mentioned textbooks, the Chinese version of *An Outline of English and Chinese Linguistics* has been used as a textbook for the undergraduates and the postgraduates majoring in English or in Chinese. This book is written in Chinese because in the lectures the students have complained that in the previous textbooks in English they have found too many new words and they could not manage to understand what linguistics is telling them about. *An Outline of English and Chinese Linguistics* is therefore written in Chinese in simple and interesting language. In this way the students can read the Chinese textbook while the teacher is lecturing in English. The problem of the students' difficulty in comprehension is thereby solved. It is proven very successful except that the students often ask for a corresponding textbook in English. *An Introduction to Linguistics* is thus written in English for the purpose to meet the needs of the students. And it is a word to word translation of *An Outline of English and Chinese Linguistics*, according to the students' requirements.

An Introduction to Linguistics is a required course for English majors, both undergraduates and the postgraduates. This book is written for the course. Its difficulties lie in the comparative study of English and Chinese languages. The study of language can dated back to the earlier period in the 20th century, and its goal is to reveal the deep structure of human language, and to describe language and

language communication in a scientific and objective method. Up till now, a series of sub-branches of linguistics have been very popular, such as phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. Besides, some interdisciplinary research has been done on sociolinguistics, which deals with the study of language and society, on psycholinguistics, which deals with the study of language and mind, on cognitive linguistics, which deals with the study of language and cognition, and so on. This book is helpful to the students in a general understanding of the fundamental knowledge of linguistics and is designed for a solid foundation of the students for their further studies in their undergraduate or postgraduate career.

The goal of the course is to help the students to understand systematically the research results of linguistics and equip the students with a reasonable knowledge of human languages, especially English and Chinese. During the course, the students will be able to apply linguistic theory to the explanation of language phenomena and the solution of concrete language problems, and thus a theoretical basis will be made for their further studies in professional theoretical courses and technical courses.

The course is a knowledge-oriented subject. In the course of teaching, focus should be set on the fundamental theories, principles and research methods of linguistics. Therefore, the students will be able to master the basic concepts and the basic theory of linguistics and have a good command of the key points on the basis of understanding and digesting.

The teaching principle of the course is to adopt syntactic examples both in English and in Chinese. Students are encouraged to provide with more examples from their own life experiences in order to match the theory with practice.

The key teaching points of the course is the basic knowledge and the basic theory of linguistics, and the core of linguistics is phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. The difficult points for the students to master are phonological theories, syntactic analysis and the theories of schools of linguistics. The way out is to reform the teaching methods, and integrate the lectures with linguistic workshops.

Each chapter of the book is preceded with lectures and workshops. Workshops are practical exercises for students to solve the linguistic problems around them, which is supposed to train the students' ability to apply basic linguistic concepts and theories to solve concrete linguistic problems. For example, in Chapter One, the students are asked to experience a brainstorm of their second foreign language or a language spoken by someone around them and to find at least two subjects to do some field research of this language spoken by them.

This course is helpful to the students in a better understanding of English and Chinese theoretically on the basis of a grasp of the knowledge of the basis linguistic concepts. In this way a

solid foundation will be made for their further studies during the period of their undergraduate studies or postgraduate studies.

Course contents:

- Chapter One Language (2 periods, 1 period of workshop)
- Chapter Two Linguistics (2 periods, 1 period of workshop)
- Chapter Three Morphology (2 periods, 1 period of workshop)
- Chapter Four Syntax (4 periods, 2 periods of workshop)
- Chapter Five Semantics (4 periods, 2 periods of workshop)
- Chapter Six Phonetics (2 periods, 1 period of workshop)
- Chapter Seven Phonology (2 periods, 1 period of workshop)
- Chapter Eight Pragmatics (2 periods, 1 period of workshop)
- Chapter Nine Language, Society and Culture (4 periods, 2 periods of workshop)
- Chapter Ten Language, Brain and Mind (4 periods, 2 periods of workshop)

The special feature of this course is the PPT exercise designed for the students in the workshop to do some practical work and to receive better guidance during the studies. The workshop can be done in the classes or after the classes according to the performance of the students. In the workshop all the exercises are open questions for the students to answer independently and hard copies of the answers should be handed in to the professor so that the students' performance may be graded accordingly which may count up to 30% in the final grading. The online sources of the open linguistic course of MIT are used for the implemented materials for the students to learn and the practical workshop. The workshop should also encourage the students to solve the linguistic problem around themselves in the actual experiences.

The manuscript of this book has been used in the linguistic courses for the 16 postgraduates of Grade 2016 and the 92 undergraduates of Grade 2014 in the School of Foreign Languages at Tianjin Polytechnic University in the second term of 2016-2017 academic years. The students liked the lectures very much and found it very interesting, rich in knowledge, explicit in explanation, salient in key points. The workshop is also very popular with the students, who think it is well designed with a combination of knowledge and interest. They said that they have benefited a lot from the course, which has turned what seems to be very boring and difficult into easy and understandable exercises.

This book is (nearly) the English version of the first ten chapters of my book in Chinese: *Yinghan yuyan yanjiu gangyao* (*An Outline of Language Studies in English and Chinese*) published by Jilin Wenshi Chubanshe (Jilin Literature and History Publishing House) in 2017. The textbook is based on several other textbooks such as *An Introduction to Language*, compiled by Fromkin et al., published in

2007 and some others. As this is written in the course of my lecturing, some of the sentences or ideas might be taken from other textbooks and forget to quote the source and give credit to the authors. If it is the case, I do apologize for the mistake I have made.

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Chapter One Language

We are so familiar with language that we have taken it for granted that speaking is a natural and easy job. Every normal person speaks a language so that no one thinks that there is any knowledge for him or her to learn in it. It is natural for human beings to neglect what seems to be easy and familiar. Language is not difficult as a man born normal is able to speak. Therefore it seems not worthy of studying. However, imagine in a world without language, if we do not chat, if we do not write, if we do not read, if we do not chat online, if we do not video online, if we do not communicate by QQ or Wechat, how can we interact effectively with each other? Whatever we do, we need to speak, and we need to communicate. Life is hopeless without language. No one can imagine what life will be if we live without language.

Language is such a necessity in our lives, but how much knowledge do we know about it? How much do we understand the nature of language? In the following section, we'll deal with the question what language is.

1.1 What is language?

Before we come to the definition of language, let's share a story first.

King Milinda respects Monk Nagasena very much. It is believed that Nagasena has enlightened himself (Samadhi) and speaks with great wisdom. One day, Milinda asks Nagasena: "Are the eyes yours?"

Nagasena smiles and says: "No. They're not."

"Is the nose yours?"

"No. It isn't."

"Is the tongue yours?"

"No. It isn't."

"Then the real you is the body?"

"No. Physical body is only a false existence."

"Then the desire is the real you?"

"No. It isn't, either."

"If the eyes, the nose, the tongue, the body and the desire are not you, then where are you?"

The monk smiles and retorts back: "Is the window the house?"

King Milinda says: "No. It isn't."

"Is the door the house?"

"No. It isn't."

"Are the bricks and the tiles the house?"

"No. They aren't."

"Then are the bed, the chair, the beams and the columns the house?"

"No. They aren't."

"If the window, the door, the bricks, the tiles, the bed, the chair, the beams and the columns are not the house, and they cannot stand for the house, then where is the house?"

Milinda suddenly had an Epiphany. What on earth did he realize?

We borrow the story here certainly not for Buddhism. But we might change the above story into a conversation about the nature of language as follows. Let's just imagine their conversation runs as what goes like in the following dialogues.

"Is the word language?"

"No. It isn't."

"Is the sound language?"

"No. It isn't."

"Is the meaning language?"

"No. It isn't."

"Is the spelling language?"

"No. It isn't."

"Then the phrase, the sentence, the utterance and the discourse are language?"

"Either of them is."

"If the word, the sound, the meaning, the spelling, the phrase, the sentence, the utterance and the discourse are not language, then where is language? What is language?"

Have you realized something about what language is? What did you realize?

1.2 The Definition of Language

There are more than 60 well-known definitions by scholars both at home and abroad, and these definitions are classified into four types (Pan, 2001): The first type of definition emphasizes on the natural nature of human beings. Scholars believe that language is innate. Chomsky (1957) is among these scholars. The second type puts its emphasis on the social cultural feature of human beings. They believe that language represents a world outlook. One of the leading figures of them is Humboldt (1836). The third type of definition is on the social cultural feature of language. They believe that language is a tool of social communication. One of the representatives of them is Stalin (1836). The last type of definition focuses on the natural property of language. They believe that language is an autonomous system. The representative of the scholars is Saussure (1926).

Based on the above studies, from my understanding of language, I'd like to define language as what is shown below:

Language is an arbitrary vocal system of symbols, by which people communicate, interact, transmit culture and express their feelings in a speech community.

The definition I have given in the above sentence reveals the basic properties of language: Firstly, language is a system. Vocal symbols in disorder could not be understood. Nobody speaks in this way. Even if there is someone who speaks in chaos, no one can understand him. For example, when someone covers his mouth and produces the speech sounds of "wawawawa", "jiligulu", and "lalalala", nobody knows what he wants to express. These vocal symbols could not be understood because they are chaotic sounds. The noises that animals make are not systemic, so they are not language. For example, dogs can only bow vow, frogs can only croak in British English and rabbit in American English, ducks can only quack, pigs oink, cat's meow, horses neigh, cows moo, sheep baaah, donkeys hee-haw, lions roar, mice squeak, hens cluck or cackle, cocks cock-a-doodle-doo, chickens chirp, peep peep (American English) and cheep cheep (British English), geese honk heckle hiss, craws caw, doves coo, hawks hoo (American English) and tu-whit, or tu-whoo (British English), little birds tweet tweet, while bees can only buzz. These cries of the animals are not language, but only conditional reflection. Language is a kind of physical matter, sound waves caused by the vibrations of the air around it when it is influenced by the outside force. *Lingshu*, written in the year of 2 B.C., describes the structure and the mechanism of how people produce sounds. In the medical classic work written in the Warring States Period, it says: "The throat is the passage of the air, the epiglottis is the house of the sounds, the lips are the fans of the sounds and the tongue is the organ of the sounds."

Secondly, language is a system of symbols. When it comes to symbols, the earliest Chinese

characters, oracles are symbolic symbols. Some of the examples are taken as below:



Figure 1-1 Oracles of the Pictographs of the 12 Chinese Zodiac Signs (12 Symbolic Animals)

In the Figure 1-1, the Chinese pictographs of the 12 animals are easily perceived: Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, and Pig. The earliest Chinese characters resemble very much like the real animal in the real world.

Language carries the natural properties of biology, physics and psychology. According to the Chinese theory of Taiji, every object such as the earth, the moon and the stars are constantly moving, and so is language. Language is an epitome of the universe. It is a dynamic system of symbols which involves special structure of words, phrases and sentences. Language, as a type of physical material, possesses physical property. Like other sounds in the natural world, speech sounds also produces a kind of energy conversion out of physical vibrations of air. Linguistic symbols are the representatives of objects, or markers of certain objects.

Thirdly, language is arbitrary. By arbitrariness it means there is no natural relationship between sound and meaning. This relationship is called “conventionality” by the Chinese philosopher Xunzi. In his *Zhengming (Appropriate Naming)*, Xunzi proposes this theory of language. He says, “There is no fixed appropriateness for names. When they are conventionalized, they are called ‘appropriate’ and when they are not conventionalized, they are not appropriate. There is no realness for names. When they are conventionalized, they are real names. There is fixed goodness for names. When they are appropriate and not violated, they are good names.” This understanding of the nature of language appears much earlier than similar theory of language in the western world. We should keep in mind that many modern theories in the west can be traced back in ancient Chinese classics. This arbitrary property of language can be embodied in the works of Shakespeare as well. An often quoted

example of arbitrariness of language is given below. “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other word would smell as sweet.” This sentence illustrates the arbitrary feature of language. If our ancestors in ancient times call the flower which is now called rose as dog’s tail, then the well-known lines “My love is just like a red, red rose, that’s newly sprung in spring.” by Robert Burns would be something like “My love is just like a red, red dog’s tail, that’s newly sprung in spring.” However, modern people, like you sitting here in the classroom today, might feel that this poem reads much awkward. In fact, imagine that in the ancient times, this flower as a symbol of love was named conventionally as a dog’s tail, we would not feel funny. We would feel the beauty and the sweetness of the flower which actually today is called a rose instead of a dog’s tail.

Fourthly, language is vocal. What can be understood in mind but cannot be spoken is not language. The sign language used by the mute and the deaf is always accompanied by their sounds of “yi-ya-yi-ya”, which shows that there are syllables and speech sounds in Chinese sign language. It seems that linguists have already made some research on the vocal property of sign language.

Fifthly, language is a tool for human communication. We need to communicate with others. This can only be done by writing or speaking. We can communicate online by QQ or WeChat. Without language, the difficulty for us to communicate cannot be imagined.

Sixthly, language is for human interaction. Like human communication, human interaction also depends on writing and speaking. Human interaction can also be done online by QQ or WeChat.

Seventhly, language is for cultural transmission. Chinese culture is known for its long history. Many historical legacies are handed down from the ancient times orally. Nearly every one of us has been told the following story when we were young: “Long long ago, there was a mountain. On the mountain, there was a temple. In the temple, there was an old monk. The old monk told the little monk: Long long ago, there was a mountain. On the mountain, there was a temple. In the temple, there was an old monk. The old monk told the little monk...” Behind the simple story, there is surely something profound hidden somewhere in it. The mountain is the same mountain, the temple can be the same temple, but the old monk might have gone and the little monk might grow old. The nature of the story remains the same, but the content of the story might be different. There is a great wisdom hidden in the short story.

Eighthly, language is used for feeling expression. When people need to express happiness, anger, sadness and joy, they need language. Without language, nobody can know what others feel. That’s why we often hear people say that “I am extremely happy today” “I’m tired” “I’m bored to death” “I love you” “I hate you”, these are the words that people use to express their feelings.

Lastly, language use is constrained to a limited speech community. People in the same speech community use the same language to communicate, interact, exchange culture and express

their feelings. In different speech community, people cannot understand each other as they speak differently.

How many languages are there in the world? The 1996 version of *Ethnologue* listed 6,703 living languages. In American, there are 1,000 living languages, which make up 15% of the total number of all the languages. In African, there are 2,011 living languages, 30% of the total number of languages. In Europe, there are 225 living languages, 3% of the total number of languages. In Asia, there are 2,165 living languages, 32% of the total number of languages. In Oceania, there are 1,302 living languages, 20% of the total number of languages. The 2005 version of *Ethnologue* listed 6,912 living languages, which does not mean that in the past nine years people had created 209 languages. In fact, the repertoire of languages is more complete, and what's more, linguists have new ideas on what was spoken by what speech community belongs to what language (Lieberman, 2016).

As to the number of the language speakers, the number of the Mandarin Chinese speakers or Putonghua speakers is the largest in the world. In the 12 countries of the world, there are 885,000,000 native speakers of Chinese. In fact, this number might not be accurate. In China, including Taiwan Province, there are about 1.4 billion native speakers of Mandarin Chinese.

In this world there are 6,059 languages which are spoken by only 1 person or very few people, according to *Ethnologue*, some of which have been extinguished, and some of which have no native speakers. What's more, people don't know the exact number of the native speakers of some of the languages. The Table 1-1 shows the number of the native speakers.

Table 1-1 The Number of the Language Users (Lieberman, 2016)

Number of Speakers	Number of Languages
1 (= Plains Miwok)	6,059
4 (= Pawnee)	5,949
10 (= Wichita)	5,878
18 (= Kiowa Apache)	5,804
100	5,576
250 (= Oneida)	5,243
305 (= Aleut)	5,110
854 (= Comanche)	4,550
1,000 (= Hawaiian)	4,501
1,721 (= Cheyenne)	4,086
5,264 (= Hopi)	3,151

续表

Number of Speakers	Number of Languages
6,213 (= Muskogee, including Creek and Seminole)	3,011
10,000	2,719
11,905 (= Cherokee)	2,515
20,355 (= Dakota)	2,048
100,000	1,114
150,000 (= Navaho)	907
260,000 (= Irish Gaelic)	669
600,000 (= Tetun, a lingua franca of East Timor)	425
1,000,000	319
2,000,000 (= Gheg Albanian)	227
3,000,000 (= Yiddish)	175
4,848,000 (Paraguayan Guarani)	136
7,372,000 (= Haitian Creole French)	99
9,472,00 (= Somali)	83
10,000,000	80
17,000,000 (= Igbo)	58
21,000,000 (= Serbo-Croatian)	44
37,000,000 (= Italian)	27
100,000,000	8

As the Table 1-1 shows, there are more than 6,000 languages quoted in *Ethnologue* as living languages in the world which are going to be extinct or have nearly been extinct. The languages in the left column with a number of 10,000 or fewer than 10,000 speakers are very fragile. There are about half of the human languages in the world in face of the danger of being extinct, when the newly born children do not speak them. A century later, the number of languages left in this beautiful world might be the half of that of today, or even fewer than 1,000 languages. At present, the speed of the extinction of languages is much faster than that of biological species. Most people think that it might be a tragedy for these languages to disappear, which might also cause a disappearance of pluralism of cultures. But the protection of language is not an easy task, although there are successful cases of language protection. We cannot save these endangered languages, but we can record them for others or our offspring to do scientific research with, in case they want to learn them or restore them. The