

English

Linguistics:

英语语言学概论 An

Introduction

王永祥 支永碧 主编

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前 言

20世纪80年代以来,语言学这门课程已经逐渐得到国内众多高校的重视,目前,几乎所有的英语本科专业都开设了《英语语言学概论》这门课程。不少英语专科及参加自学考试和函授学习的学生与教师们也在学习英语语言学。《普通语言学》更是英语专业研究生的一门必修课程。随着国外原版教材和专著的引进以及国内不少语言学教材的陆续出版,我国读者可以更容易地接触和学习语言学理论。但是,语言学理论发展很快,研究成果日新月异;同时,我们在教学过程中发现,学生们普遍感到英语语言学这门课程术语繁多、内容抽象、晦涩难懂;因此,他们对原版教材和国内普遍采用的一些语言学教材仍有不少畏惧心理。多数教师在仅有的课时内也难以全部讲授所有章节,而学生自学起来也比较困难。鉴于此,我们广泛参考了国内外众多的语言学专著和教材,吸收了国内外语言学界的一些重要理论研究成果,编写了一本更简明、更实用的语言学教程:《英语语言学概论》。

本教材共分四编:第一编介绍了语言和语言学;第二编介绍了语言学的主要分支——语音学、音位学、形态学、句法学、语义学和语用学;第三编为跨学科领域与应用——话语分析、社会语言学、心理语言学,以及语言学理论与外语教学;第四编介绍了现代语言学流派。此外,我们还编写了三个附录:附录一是全书各章练习的部分参考答案;附录二是两套综合模拟试卷和参考答案;附录三是专门针对本书语言学术语的英汉对照表,供读者查阅使用。

关于第八章语用学的归类,目前仍然存在争议:语用学曾经是符号学的三个分支之一,而在现代语言学中被应用于研究语言(Crystal, 1985:240)。梅伊在他的《语用学引论》(Mey, 1993/2001)的第一章中也提到语用学的归属问题,他认为既可以将语用学看作是语言学的一个成分(component),也可以把语用学看作是研究语言的一个视角(perspective)。因此,我们可以将语用学与语音学、音系学、词法、句法和语义学并列对待,将它们看作语言系统内的语言学的分支(即第二编:语言学的主要分支);也可以将语用学看作是语言学的应用范畴,或看作是跨语言学、哲学、社会学等领域的边缘学科(Bussmann, 2000:374)(即第三编:跨学科领域与应用)。在本书中,我们将第八章归入第二编,只是一个取舍。

本教材以英语专业的本科生(包括自考生和函授生)为主要教学对象,也可供研究生和教师进修学习使用。在内容方面,不求面面俱到,但求简明易懂;既注重基础理论,又吸收国内外最新的语言学理论研究成果。考虑到简明性,我们没有编入认知语言学和文体学理论知识,但教师在使用本教材时可以作适当补充。

本教材的总体分工大致如下:王永祥负责编写第六、七、十章以及附录一、三,各章练

习和其他章节的部分单元,并对全书内容进行补充、修订和审校。支永碧负责编写第一、二、三、四、五、八、九、十一、十二、十三章和附录二,并参与其他三章及附录与习题的审校补充。本书由王永祥、支永碧共同策划,王永祥负责统稿。

由于编者水平仍很有限,错误之处在所难免,欢迎读者和同仁批评指正。

编者
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于南京师大随园

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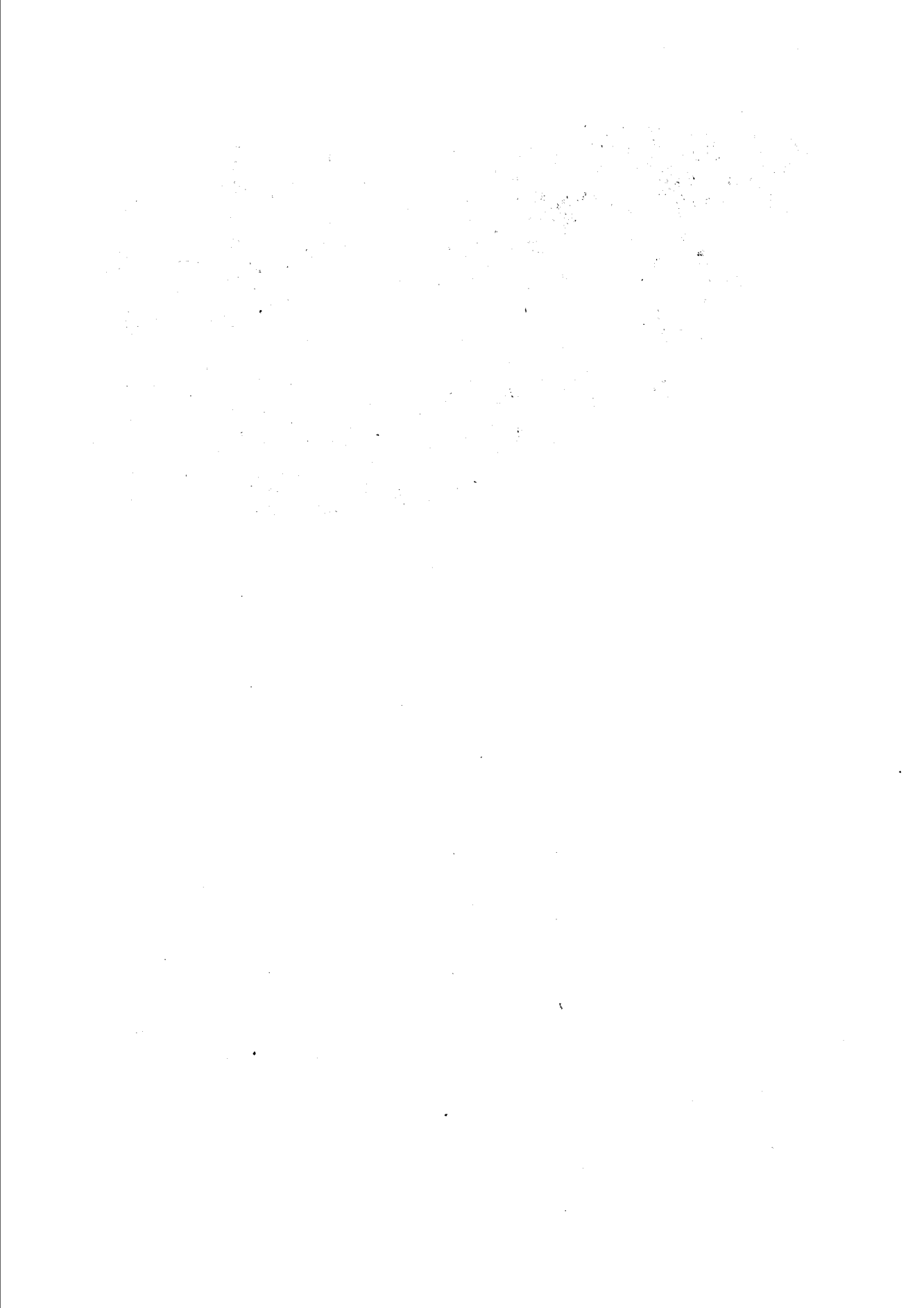


PART

1

Introduction





Chapter 1

Language



1. Definition of language
2. Design features of language
3. Functions of language

Our course book is entitled *English Linguistics: An Introduction*. Before discussing the scope of linguistics, we feel it necessary to answer the central defining question: *What is Language?* This is a question which linguistics can't parry and one which linguists feel is difficult to answer.

1.1 What is language?

There is no simple answer to this question. People have attempted to answer it for centuries, but no one has provided a definition which can be said to satisfy everyone. For example, many 19th century linguists (e. g. Hermann Paul) saw it as an organism. They thought that the relationship between the individual languages and language as an abstract concept can be compared to the relationship between individual animals or plants and the concept of animal or plant. The structuralists (e. g. F. de Saussure) regarded language as an edifice or a well-defined object. They were interested in the structure of language. American structuralist Sapir claimed that "language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols" (Sapir, 1921). The sociolinguists (e. g. M. A. K. Halliday) regard it as an activity which consists of listening, speaking, reading and writing. The behaviorists (e. g. B. F. Skinner) see language in terms of operant behavior and equate human beings with pigeons. The transformationalists (e. g. N. Chomsky) see language as an internalized system of rules and equate human beings with automata. In the 1950s, Chomsky defined language this way: "From now on I will consider language to be a set (finite or infinite) of sentences, each finite in length and constructed out of a finite set of elements" (Chomsky, 1957).

We can see that each of the above-mentioned linguists has his own special emphasis in defining language. Different scholars have approached language from different perspectives and have different opinions and explanations about language. The following is a definition which has been accepted by most people:

"Language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication" (Wardhaugh, 1979: 3).

Short and simple as it seems, this definition has captured the main features of language.

First, language is a **system**, i. e., elements of language are combined according to rules. Every language contains a set of rules. This explains why **elbta* is not a possible sound combination in English, and also why **been he a way has* is not a grammatically acceptable sentence in English. By system, in effect, we mean the recurring patterns or arrangements or the particular ways or designs in which a language operates. It is because the sounds which are used to form words and the words which are used to form sentences do not appear at will but are used in fixed patterns that speakers of a language can understand each other. That is to say, it is because every language has its system that it conveys the same meaning to its speakers. Of course, every language contains two systems: a system of sounds and a system of meanings. This is called “duality of structure” or “double structured”, one of the design features of human language that will be discussed later in this chapter.

Second, language is **arbitrary** in the sense that there is no intrinsic or logical connection between a linguistic symbol and what the symbol stands for. For example, there is no motivated connection between the word *dog* and the animal we refer to. The reason why we call an animal a *dog* instead of a *pig* is that we human beings all used this symbol for it at the very beginning. If, at the very beginning, human beings had used another linguistic symbol *pig* to stand for the animal which the word *dog* refers to now, then perhaps the so-called *dog* animal would be called *pig* now. In fact, the existence of homophones is a good illustration of arbitrariness of language. Within the same language, the same sound form may represent two or more different meanings. For example, in English, *sea* and *see* have exactly the same pronunciation /si:/, but they have radically different meanings; the former is a noun, meaning *expanse of salt water covering most of earth* and the latter a verb, meaning *perceive with the eyes*. Another piece of evidence is the fact that the same meaning may be represented by different sound forms. Every language is abundant with synonyms, which are good examples of arbitrariness of language. For example, *fortunate* and *lucky* are two forms with the same meaning in English. This point can be further illustrated by the fact that different languages have different linguistic expressions for the same object. For example, in English, people use *book* to stand for the object “written or printed work with pages bound along one side”. But in Chinese, people use *shū*(书), in Japanese, *hon*(本), in French, *livre*, etc.

This also explains the third feature of language, **symbolic** nature; words are just symbols; they are associated with objects, actions, ideas, etc. by convention. The conventional nature of language is well illustrated by a famous quotation from Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*: “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet” (Dai Weidong, 2002: 9). In other words, although the choice of certain sound symbols for certain objects, events or ideas is arbitrary, once the relationship is established, it becomes a fixed convention. That is to say, the use of these sound symbols is on no account arbitrary but follows certain conventions which speakers of the language have agreed on. It is because the sounds and words of a language are used in fixed ways that the speakers of the language can understand one another, thus making communication and interaction possible. This is also consistent with the word “system” in the definition of language.

Every symbol consists of two parts; a concrete object or form and the meaning or idea which the object or form conveys. For example, the traffic signals are composed of

two parts; red and green lights are concrete objects while *stop at the sight of red lights* and *pass at the sight of green lights* constitute the meanings. It's the same case with linguistic symbols: the linguistic symbol *pen* consists of the sound form /pen/ and its meaning *implement for writing with ink*.

Fourth, language is **vocal** because the primary medium for all languages is sound. All evidence proves the fact that the writing system came into being much later than the spoken forms and that they only attempt to capture sounds and meaning on paper. The fact that children acquire spoken language before they are able to read or write also indicates that language is primarily vocal.

Two types of symbols may be identified; visual and auditory symbols. The traffic signals mentioned above belong to the former while whistles and drum beats to the latter. Vocal symbols, which are produced by human speech organs, are part of auditory symbols.

And finally, language is used for **human communication**. Language is possessed only by human beings. It allows people to talk to one another and to express their thoughts and needs. Animals do have their communicative systems such as bird songs, the dance of bees, the bark of dogs, etc. However, no system of animal communication is characterized by duality of structure and few systems of animal communication use discrete arbitrary symbols. Systems of animal communication are closely and directly associated with their basic needs of life. None of them allows their users to dwell on the past experience, foresee the future and tell lies like human language. Systems of animal communication can only indicate simple things such as source of food and express simple emotions such as anger or happiness, but human language can express very complex ideas such as theory devising and hypothesis making. In addition, no systems of animal communication can do things like human language such as making a request, promoting a sale or naming an object. In brief, language is a unique system of communication. It is the cement of society. It allows people to live, work and play together, to tell the truth or to tell lies.

1.2 Design features of human language

Design features, a framework proposed by the American linguist Charles Hockett, refer to the defining properties of human language that distinguish it from any animal system of communication. By comparing language with animal communication systems, we can have a better understanding of the nature of language. From among the twelve design features, we shall just take seven of them and describe how they are manifested in human language. We shall also try to describe in what ways these features are uniquely a part of human language and unlikely to be found in the communication systems of other creatures.

1.2.1 Productivity

Productivity is a feature of all languages that novel utterances are continually being created. It refers to the ability that people have in making and comprehending indefinitely large quantities of sentences in their native language, including sentences they have never heard before. Much of what they say and hear they are saying or

hearing for the first time. A child learning language is especially active in forming and producing utterances which he or she has never heard before. With adults, new situations arise or new objects have to be described, thus the language users manipulate their linguistic resources to produce new expressions and new sentences. The property of human language is labeled as **productivity** or creativity. It is an aspect of language which is linked to the fact that the potential number of utterances in any human language is infinite.

Productivity is unique to human language. Most animal communication systems appear to be highly restricted in regard to the number of different signals that their users can send and receive. Take bee dancing for instance. It is used only to indicate food sources, which is the only kind of message that can be sent through the dancing.

1.2.2 Discreteness

Discreteness refers to the phenomenon that the sounds in a language are meaningfully distinct. For instance, the difference between the sounds /p/ and /b/ is not actually very great, but when these sounds are part of a language like English, they are used in such a way that the occurrence of one rather than the other is meaningful. The fact that the pronunciation of the forms *pad* and *bad* leads to a distinction in meaning can only be due to the difference between the sounds /p/ and /b/ in English. Each sound in the language is thought of as discrete. It is possible to produce a range of sounds in a continuous stream which are all generally like the sounds /p/ and /b/. According to Yule (2000), that continuous stream will only be interpreted as being either a *p* sound or a *b* sound (or, possibly, as a non-sound) in the language. We have a discrete view of the sounds of our language and wherever a pronunciation falls within the physically possible range of sounds, it will be interpreted as a linguistically specific and meaningfully distinct sound.

1.2.3 Displacement

Displacement is one of the defining properties of human language, which refers to the fact that human language can be used to talk about things that are present or not present, real or not real, and about matters in the past, present or future, or in far-away places. In other words, language can be used to refer to contexts removed from the immediate situations of its users. This phenomenon is thought of as "displacement", which can provide its users with an opportunity to communicate about a wide range of subjects, free from any barriers caused by separation in time and space. That is, the feature of displacement can enable us to talk about things and places whose existence we cannot even be sure of. We can refer to mythical creatures, demons, fairies, angels, Santa Claus, and recently invented characters such as superman. This feature is unique to human language. No animal communication system possesses it. Some animal calls are often uttered in response to immediate changes of situation. For instance, during the mating season, in the present of danger or pain, animals will make calls. Once the danger or pain is missing, their calls stop.

1.2.4 Arbitrariness

Arbitrariness refers to the phenomenon that there is no motivated relationship between a linguistic form and its meaning. Take the English word *dog* for example. The linguistic form has no natural or “iconic” relationship with the four-legged barking animal outside in the world. If there were, it would be rather odd that we Chinese refer to the same animal by using *gou*(狗), while Japanese get by with *yi nu*(犬), etc.

Of course, we should be aware that onomatopoeic words, such as *quack-quack*, *bang*, *cuckoo*, *rumble*, *slurp*, and *sqelch* or *whirr* in the English language, are exceptions, but they are relatively rare, and the majority of linguistic expressions are in fact arbitrary. Some compound words are also not entirely arbitrary. For instance, while *type* and *writer* are both arbitrary, the compound word *typewriter* is not entirely arbitrary.

For the majority of animal signals, there does appear to be a clear connection between the conveyed message and the signal used to convey it. This impression we have of the non-arbitrariness of animal signaling may be closely connected with the fact that, for any animal, the set of signals used in communication is finite. That is to say, each variety of animal communication consists of a fixed and limited set of (vocal or gesture) forms. Many of these are used only in a specific situation and at particular times.

1.2.5 Cultural transmission

Cultural transmission refers to the fact that language is not culturally transmitted. It is passed on from one generation to the next through teaching and learning, rather than by inheritance. Though it has been argued that humans are born with an innate predisposition to acquire language, it is clear that they are not born with the ability to make utterances in a specific language, such as Chinese, Japanese and English. By contrast, animal communication systems are genetically transmitted. The general pattern of animal communication is that the signals used are instinctive and not learned. Animals are born with the capacity to produce the set of calls peculiar to their species. All cats, dogs and bees, for example, have systems which are almost identical to those of all other cats, dogs and bees. Animals pass on this capacity from one generation to the next by instinct rather than by teaching. Nonetheless, this does not deny that human capacity for language has a genetic basis; in fact only human beings have a special capacity for learning language that is not shared by other animals because every child at birth is equipped with Language Acquisition Device(LAD)^①, this special ability enables the child to acquire any language exposed to him.

① Language Acquisition Device (LAD) is a “specifically human mechanism postulated by Norm Chomsky, in connection with the linguistic interpretation of rationalism, to explain the phenomenon that children — although the linguistic utterances of their environment represent only deficient and incomplete input — gain a command of the syntactic rules of their mother tongue in a relatively short time and can produce and understand an almost unlimited number of grammatical expressions. Every child is equipped with an innate schema for valid grammars and with a system of cognitive procedures for developing and checking hypotheses about the input” (Bussmann, 2000: 256).

1.2.6 Duality or double articulation

Language is a system. It is organized into two levels simultaneously. We have distinct sounds at the lower level (sound level), which is seen as a sequence of segments which have no meaning in themselves. At the higher level, we have distinct meanings (meaningful level). Language is analyzed in terms of combination of meaningful units. Then the meaningful units (such as morphemes, words, etc.) at the higher level can be arranged and rearranged into an infinite number of sentences. The organization of language into two levels, one of sounds, the other of meaning, is known as **duality or double articulation**. This unique feature of language enables its users to talk about anything within their knowledge. No animal communication system possesses the feature of duality.

1.2.7 Interchangeability

Interchangeability means that any human being can be both a producer and a receiver of messages. We can say, and on other occasions can receive and understand, for example, "Please do something to make me happy." Though some people suggest that there is sex differentiation in the actual language use, in other words, men and women may say different things, yet in principle there is no sound, word or sentence that a man can utter but a woman cannot, or vice versa. On the other hand, a person can be the speaker while the other person is the listener and as the turn moves on to the listener, he can be the speaker and the first speaker is to listen. It is turn-talking that makes social communication possible and acceptable.

Some male birds, however, utter some calls which females do not (or cannot), and certain kinds of fish have similar sex-restricted types of communication. Another example is perhaps mentionable. When a dog barks, all the neighboring dogs bark. Then people around can hardly tell which dog (dogs) is (are) "speaking" and which "listening".

1.3 Functions of human language

The essential nature of language is the cognitive function which is seen as a psychological phenomenon. According to Wang Gang (1988: 11), the functions of language can be mainly embodied in three aspects. i) Language is a tool of human communication; ii) Language is a tool whereby people learn about the world; iii) Language is a tool by which people create art.

As a matter of fact, different linguists have different terms for the various functions of language. The British linguist M. A. K. Halliday uses the following terms to refer to the initial functions of children's language:

1.3.1 Instrumental

The **instrumental function** of language refers to the fact that language allows speakers to get things done. It allows them to control things in the environment. People can cause things to be done and to happen through the use of words alone. An

immediate contrast here is with the animal world in which sounds are hardly used in this way, and, when they are, they are used in an extremely limited degree. The instrumental function can be too primitive in human interaction. Performative utterances such as the words which name a ship at a launching ceremony clearly have instrumental functions if the right circumstances exist; they are acts, e. g. *I name this ship Liberty Bell*. In other cases, the function of language is to control matter, or reality, which the matter is supposed to represent. For example, the speaking of the words *I pronounce you husband and wife* by a clergyman is believed to identify the moment when the couple legally get married.

But the instrumental function may be served by other utterances than performatives, e. g. by suggestion and persuasion as well as by direction, as in *I suggest you come*, *It is going to rain (so take your umbrella)* and *You'll get hurt (so stop)*, etc.

1.3.2 Regulatory

The **regulatory function** refers to language used in an attempt to control events once they happen. Those events may involve the self as well as others. People do try to control themselves through language, e. g. *Why did I say that? / Steady! / And Let me think about that again*. Language helps to regulate encounters among people. Language provides devices for regulating specific kinds of encounters and contains words for approving or disapproving and for controlling or disrupting the behavior of others. It allows us to establish complex patterns of organization in order to try to regulate behavior, from game playing to political organization, from answering the telephone to addressing in foreign affairs. It is the regulatory function of language that allows people some measure of getting control over events that occur in their lives.

1.3.3 Representational

The **representational function** refers to the use of language to communicate knowledge about the world, to report events, to make statements, to give accounts, to explain relationships, to relay messages and so on. This function of language is represented by all kinds of record-keeping, such as historical records, geographical surveys, business accounts, scientific reports, government acts, and public data banks. It is an essential domain of language use, for the availability of this material guarantees the knowledge-base of subsequent generations, which is a prerequisite of social development.

Sometimes misinformation is given, because telling lies is an example of this same function. As is mentioned earlier, certain rules exist to regulate language behavior when an exchange of information is involved. For example, the truth must be whole, not partial, assumptions must be made about what the listener knows, the information supplied must be neither inadequate nor gratuitous, and, if the intent is honest, any kind of misrepresentation and ambiguity must be avoided. In circumstances in which a speaker has a highly eccentric view of what the world is like, utterances which claim to represent that world will be treated as peculiar by others. Certain types of peculiarity will lead to the speaker being classified as a fool or a genius, a lunatic or a visionary, a

sinner or a saint. The precise representations of the world shift from time to time as the views for judging the world shift, e. g. the earth as flat, atoms as particles, God as dead, sex as dirty, language as words and so on.

1.3.4 Interactional

The **interactional function** refers to language used to ensure social maintenance. Phatic communion is part of it. The term phatic communion introduced by the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski refers to language used for establishing an atmosphere or maintaining social contact rather than for exchanging facts. A greeting such as *how are you?* is relatively empty of content, and answers like *fine* or *very well*, *thank you* are equally empty, because the speaker is not interested in the hearer's health, but rather to demonstrate his politeness and general attitude toward the other person when he gives a conversational greeting. Similarly, discussing weather is a safe topic, one on which people usually agree and for which neither speaker nor the listener can be blamed if it is unpleasant. Those small "meaningless" exchanges indicate that a channel of communication is open if the conversation shifts to the use of informative language. In a broad sense, this function refers to all uses of language that help to define and maintain groups, e. g. teenage slang, family jokes, professional jargon, ritualistic exchanges, social and regional dialects and so on. People must learn a wide variety of such different language usages if they wish to interact comfortably with many others. Successful interaction requires saying things appropriately whatever they are, and using language in the socially prescribed way. Such uses of language as conversational greetings, comments on the weather, and small talk at the parties do not impart new and important ideas. Nevertheless, they do express the speaker's attitudes. They show that people are still on speaking terms with each other and that a certain amount of courtesy can be expected if the conversation shifts to the use of informative language.

1.3.5 Personal

The **personal function** refers to language used to express the individual's feelings, emotions and personality. A person's individuality is usually characterized by his or her use of personal function of communication. Each individual has a "voice" in what happens to him. He is free to speak or not to speak, to say, as much or as little as he pleases, and to choose how to say what he says. The use of language can tell the listener or reader a great deal about the speaker or writer — in particular, about his regional origin, social background, level of education, occupation, age, sex, and personality.

Language also provides the individual with a means to express feelings, whether outright in the form of exclamations, endorsements, or curse, or much more subtly through a careful choice of words. Many social situations display language used to foster a sense of identity; the shouting of a crowd at a football match, the shouting of names or slogans at public meetings, the reactions of the audience to television game shows, the shouts of affirmation at some religious meetings. For example, the crowds attending President Regan's pre-election meetings in 1984 repeatedly shouted "*Four*

more years!" which united among those who shared the same political views.

1.3.6 Heuristic

The **heuristic function** refers to language used in order to acquire knowledge and understanding of the world. Language may be used for learning. Questions can lead to answers, argumentation to conclusions and hypothesis-testing to new discoveries. The heuristic function provides a basis for the structure of knowledge in the different disciplines. Language allows people to ask questions about the nature of the world they live in and to construct possible answers. Formal education is a means for introducing those who participate in such education into this function. The product is often the acquisition of some familiarity with a set of abstract systems that claim to offer explanations of one kind or another. Insofar as the inquiry into language itself, a necessary result is the creation of a metalanguage, i. e. a language used to refer to language, containing terms such as sound, syllable, word, structure, sentence, meaning and so on.

1.3.7 Imaginative

The **imaginative function** refers to language used to create imaginary system, whether these are literary works, philosophical systems or utopian visions on the one hand, or daydreams and idle musings on the other hand. It is also language used for sheer joy of using language, such as a baby's babbling, a chanter's chanting, a poet's pleasuring. Verbal games and telling tall stories are just a few of the instances of language used imaginatively in order to entertain yourself or others. The imaginative function also allows people to consider not just the real world but all possible worlds and many impossible ones. Much literature is the most obvious example to serve this function as an account of Robinson Crusoe in the deserted island. The imaginative function enables life to be lived vicariously and helps satisfy numerous deep artistic urges.

Speaking is a complex activity, which involves two or more of these functions in most uses. A person who admires someone's new car may be expressing genuine emotion; at the same time he may be engaging in a bit of interactional conversation or even instrumental language if he is implying for a drive. A salesman normally gives information about his products as he is trying to persuade the customer to buy it. Each of the functions can be performed by tone of voice, gestures and facial expressions as well. It is important that every speaker should know how to use sentences appropriately, concurrent with how to form them correctly.

Later on, when they enter the adult linguistic system, children generalize from the initial set of functions an opposition between language as doing and language as learning. This is the developmental origin of the **interpersonal** and **ideational** components in the semantic system of the adult language (the third of Halliday's functional components of meaning is **textual**).