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C Comparative
Studies in
Language &
Culture

英汉语言文化学

常宗林
CHANG Zonglin

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CHANG Zonglin

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Preface

The idea of writing on this topic came to me during my study for my PhD in the School of English Studies, Nottingham University. But I was too busy then on my PhD thesis to finish this book. My strong interests however have never been doused. Prompted constantly by the earnest interests in this field, I began to start on this book as soon as I got my PhD and came back to China. As a university teacher for more than twenty years, I am quite aware how important it is for students to master the basic knowledge of languages and cultures that is beneficial either for their further studies or for their



future work in this age of globalization. The book had been originally cast as handouts of a series of lectures to the MA postgraduates on language and culture before it was finally finished according to the book schema.

The book presents a coherent perspective on the contrastive study of languages and cultures. As its title indicates, it is mainly concerned with Chinese and English languages and cultures. It provides an overview of the basic principles and methods of language and culture studies, in particular as they are applied to contrastive issues. It is meant either to be used as a textbook for a course of language and culture study for advanced undergraduates and postgraduate students or to function as an introduction to the study of languages and cultures for researchers in neighboring disciplines.

The book consists of sixteen chapters. It is designed for 36 hours teaching with relevant exercises and books suggested for further reading.

I would like to thank Professor Ronald Carter,



my PhD supervisor for detailed help at all points and for inspiration at all times. I would like to thank Ocean University of China for its kind sponsorship in my project. Thanks should also be given to a number of friends and colleagues, who have helped with numerous specifics at various junctures over the course of the years. The influence of their written work in the current project is impossible to cite fully. I would like to dedicate this book to my wife and daughter whose affections and understanding gave me enormous spiritual support.

CHANG Zonglin

Ocean University of China

8th July, 2003



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Unit 1 A Brief Survey

1.1 Introduction

In a book published in 1998, Claire Kramsch made a statement about the relationship between language and culture, which has been greatly circulated among academic researchers. She says in the beginning of her book (Kramsch, 1998:3):

“Language is the principal means whereby we conduct our social lives. When it is used in contexts of communication, it is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways.”

“... The words people utter refer to common experience. They express facts, ideas or events that are communicable because they refer to a stock of knowledge about the world that other people share. Words also reflect their authors' attitudes and beliefs, their points of view that are also those of others. In both cases, *language expresses cultural reality.*”

“But members of a community or social group do not only ex-



press experience; they also create experience through language. They give meanings to it through the medium they choose to communicate with one another, for example, speaking on the telephone or face-to-face, writing a letter or sending an e-mail message, reading the newspaper or interpreting a graph or a chart. The way in which people use the spoken, written or visual medium itself creates meanings that are understandable to the group they belong to, for example, through a speaker's tone of voice, accent, conversational style, gestures, and facial expression. Through all its verbal and non-verbal aspects, *language embodies cultural reality.*"

"... Language is a system of *signs* that is seen as having itself a cultural value, speakers identify themselves and others through their use of language; they view their language as a symbol of their social identity. The prohibition of its use is often perceived by its speakers as a rejection of their social group and their culture. Thus we can say that *language symbolizes cultural reality.*"

Language is a means to express and exchange thoughts, concepts, knowledge and information as well as to fix and transmit experience and knowledge. Based on cognitive processes, subject to societal factors and historical change and development, it refers to a specific form of expression that is restricted to humans, and differs from other possible languages, such as animal communication and artificial languages through creativity. It is a genetically innate human capacity based on neuro-physiological processes for directing cognitive and communicative processes. It also refers to an individual national language such as Chinese, English and Rus-



sian (Bussmann, 2000).

1.2

Language Studies

What are language studies? According to Linda Thomas and Shan Wareing etc. , language studies can be summarized into the following disciplines or sub-disciplines (Thomas and Wareing, 1999) :

- ◆ the study of the role of language in different cultures (*anthropology*) ;
- ◆ the study of language and linguistics in relation to practical problems, such as language teaching, lexicography and translation (*applied linguistics*) ;
- ◆ an approach to language that is based on people's experience of the world and the way they perceive and conceptualize it (*cognitive linguistics*) ;
- ◆ the study of how languages change through time; the relationships of languages to each other (*comparative historical linguistics*) ;
- ◆ the study of two or more languages in order to compare their structures and to show whether they are similar or different (*comparative linguistics*) ;
- ◆ an approach to linguistics which uses mathematical techniques, often with the aid of a computer to analyze language data in order to establish the order in which learners acquire various grammatical rules or the frequency of occurrence of some particular item; it also includes research on automatic translation, electronic production of artificial speech (*computational linguistics*) ;



tics);

- ◆ the study of how a language changes over a period of time, e. g. the change in the sound system of English from Early English to Modern British English (*diachronic linguistics*);
- ◆ the study of how sentences in spoken and written language form larger meaningful units such as paragraphs, conversations, interviews (*discourse analysis*);
- ◆ the study of language as a system of human communication, which covers a wide field with different approaches and different areas of investigations (*linguistics*);
- ◆ the study of the way in which words are constructed out of smaller meaningful units (*morphology*);
- ◆ the study of the brain and how it functions in the production, perception and acquisition of language (*neurolinguistics*);
- ◆ the study of the relationship between meaning, language and perception (*philosophy*);
- ◆ the study of nature, production and perception of sounds of speech (*phonetics*);
- ◆ the study of the sound systems of individual languages and of the nature of such systems generally (*phonology*);
- ◆ the study of how the meaning conveyed by a word or sentence depends on aspects of the context in which it is used (such as time, place, social relationship between speaker and hearer, and speaker's assumptions about the hearer's beliefs) (*pragmatics*);
- ◆ the study of how human brains work, the relationship of language and cognitive structures and the acquisition of language (*psycholinguistics*);



- ◆ the study of meaning; how words and sentences are related to the (real or imaginary) objects they refer to and the situations they describe (*semantics*);
- ◆ the different *varieties* of language people use, and why there are linguistic differences between different groups (*sociolinguistics*);
- ◆ an approach to linguistics which stresses the importance of language as a system and which investigates the place that linguistic units such as sounds, words, sentences have within this system (*structural linguistics*);
- ◆ the study of style in language: traditionally, of variations in usage among literary and other texts; now, more generally of any systematic variation, in either writing or speech (*stylistics*);
- ◆ the study of a language system at one particular point in time, e.g. the sound system of Modern British English (*synchronic linguistics*);
- ◆ the study of grammatical relations between words and other units within the sentence (*syntax*);
- ◆ an approach to linguistics developed by Halliday which sees language in a social context and considers language as a resource used for communication and not as a set of rules (*systemic linguistics*);
- ◆ a branch of linguistics which studies spoken or written texts and which is concerned with the way the parts of a text are organized and related to one another in order to form a meaningful whole (*text linguistics*).