语言哲学：

在现代西方语言学的背后

A WESTERN PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE:

A Guide for Students of Linguistics

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PREFACE

Without any grounding in Western philosophy, Chinese students of English may find it difficult to understand various linguistic theories and hypotheses that grow out of Western culture, much less to develop their own opinions on the issues that these theories and hypotheses deal with. The purpose of this book is to be of help in this regard. It tries to present a philosophical context for linguistic developments in the West (mainly in the English speaking world) so that students from China can approach English linguistics with a better sense of direction.

Clarifying this purpose already hints at a number of disclaimers.

First, I aim this book at a readership with no prior knowledge of Western philosophy; it does not suit anyone who is already studying or working in the field of philosophy. At the same time, since it is written for students of linguistics and applied linguistics, it does assume that readers will have some knowledge of Western linguistics. For this reason, when linguistic terms pop up in discussion, they are not always defined or clarified. Also, in order to make the text more accessible to students, simple language often replaces philosophical jargon. This, however, may result in inaccurate simplification of some theories, and I apologize for this.

Second, I do not intend this book to give a comprehensive overview of the philosophy of language in the West. Rather, it only touches upon the philosophical schools and theories that are related to major linguistic theories in contemporary English speaking countries. A very important 20th century divide exists between analytic philosophy and continental philosophy, but since modern

linguistics in English speaking countries has grown under the direct influence of analytic philosophy, the book will narrowly focus on this tradition. Continental philosophy, "continental" referring to continental Europe, has also developed important theories about language, but since it treats language as fluid and open to interpretation and negotiation, people usually do not feel it has much influence on how linguists may analyze language. Although it does play an important role in the development of critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis, its major influence is on literary criticism and the study of literature. Critical linguistics, after all, has not yet been extensively introduced to China. This is why the book has ignored continental philosophy; it makes no mention of names such as Nietzsche and Heiddegger, or Foucault and Derrida, despite the fact that they each may have extensively discussed language.

Third, I do not intend this book to present a survey from an "objective," nonpartisan perspective, partly because this would be impossible since being selective of philosophical theories already means being subjective. The only solution, it seems, is to lay bare my own stance and let readers judge and criticize. It is certain that my own bias and mistakes will show up in discussions, but while they may mislead some readers, for which I, again, apologize. I do hope that they will lead others to think critically. After all, readers should be encouraged to engage themselves, take sides, and support their opinions with their own thinking. Instead of going after a bird's eye view of the philosophy of language, they should "fight" their way into the field.

For this reason, I suggest that readers of this book read it with a critical mind. This has nothing to do with modesty, but rather, it is an attitude that one should hold when reading any philosophical discussion by anyone, at any time. People should be careful with any discussion in this book and should compare it with other

readings; more importantly, they should think, reason and reflect on their own language learning and teaching experiences.

I am very grateful to Linell Davis, Don Snow and Janet Roberts. Linell commented on an earlier draft of the manuscript and encouraged me to complete this project. Don and Janet patiently read several drafts, did much editing, and offered many invaluable suggestions. Without their help, this project would not be possible. All the errors remain mine since I kept making changes to the manuscript they had edited and cleaned up.

I would like to thank the students from my Philosophy of Language class who discussed many parts of this manuscript and gave me many ideas, some of which have been incorporated into the book.

I should thank the K. C. Wong Education Foundation in Hong Kong and the British Academy in London for providing support during my sabbatical when I was drafting this manuscript. I should also thank Cardiff University, UK, for letting me use their library resources.

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Ting Yenren
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前　言

　　意义是什么？语言又是什么？它究竟是怎样产生和发展的？这是一些根本性的而语言学的实证研究又尚不能回答的问题，语言哲学则是一门试图回答这些问题的学科。

　　本书用简洁的语言介绍对现代西方语言学、应用语言学发展有过或有着重要影响的一些西方语言哲学流派，如描写理论、真值理论学派、日常语言学派（语用学派）、索绪尔结构主义、沃尔夫语言相对论、乔姆斯基生成学派等。在介绍这些流派的同时，本书作者围绕语言起源及发展变化的原因等语言哲学的根本性问题，对这些学派作了一定的分析和评论。内容可以分为四个题目：

　　一、讨论指称（reference）问题。语言哲学各流派间争议最大的问题是意义（meaning）的真谛，而争议的焦点集中在指称在意义中的地位。密尔的直接指称理论认为意义即指称；弗雷格、罗素的描述理论批评了直接指称理论对意义认识的简单化，强调单词的含义（sense）或者限定描述（definite description）在意义中的重要性，而普特南、克里普克的起因指称理论重新强调指称的重要，认为在限定描述有缺失甚至有错误的情况下指称仍然可以实现。这些理论有各自的贡献和缺陷。根据语言学、应用语言学一些研究成果推测，语言意义来源于社会交往、来源于语言使用的实践。尽管意义一经产生就具备相对于现实世界的独立性，但它的变化和发展仍旧决定于社会实践。

　　二、讨论以弗雷格、罗素为代表的将意义视为能指（intension）的语言哲学界正统派。该学派代表了西方哲学史上的"语言学转向"，其思想渊源可以追溯到洛克等英国经验主义思想家，但它在西方思想界取得的长期统治地位直到 20 世纪才确立起来，其代表人物除了弗雷格、罗素以外，还包括早期维特根斯坦、"维也纳学派"、卡尔纳普、塔尔斯基等。这一流派的可证实原则、真值理论等学说将解决哲学根本问

题转变为一个将哲学命题分解为子命题、继而逐个求证所有子命题的过程,将哲学问题化解成了语言问题(即逻辑问题)。由于该学派强调纯粹的逻辑性语言,轻视实际生活中的语言和语言使用,它对语言学研究、对语言学习和教学研究有消极影响,主要表现为忽视语言运用对语言的影响,忽视语言实践的作用。

三、讨论作为正统派的对立面出现的后期维特根斯坦学派、日常语言学派、语用学派等,这些理论都坚持"意义即应用"的观点,因此可归为一个流派。由于该流派注重对现实生活中语言的观察和研究,对现代应用语言学诸多领域均有较大的积极影响,但也正因为如此,讨论特别提醒读者注意其不足之处,例如,正统派将哲学问题化解为语言问题,而后期维特根斯坦、奥斯汀、格莱思等在这个问题上与正统派基本上没有多少区别,它们把哲学上的分歧说成是源于语言使用上的差异,并就此置理论于一旁而醉心于语用上细微的分析。因而这一学派没有能最终回答什么是意义的问题。

四、讨论从正统派派生出来的结构主义学派,这一流派至今有相当大的影响。它强调语言的系统性和唯一性,强调语言是一个独立于外部世界和其它知识的、自我完善的体系。这部分的讨论将运用认知语言学、语料库语言学和语言习得研究的一些新成果,特别是关于程式记忆学习在语言使用和语言习得中作用的研究,分别评述索绪尔结构主义、沃尔夫语言相对论和乔姆斯基生成学派,指出它们的不足和消极影响,如将语言与其在社会生活中的使用相割裂、将其看成是语法加词汇的封闭体系、将语言习得和运用神秘化等,这些消极的影响在语言学、应用语言学的研究中都可以看到。

贯穿各个题目讨论的基本观点是:尽管语言相对于生活现实具有一定的独立性,但是归根结底语言的意义以及语言意义变化和发展的原动力不是来自语言内部,也不是来自语言使用者的大脑,而是来自语言使用者的社会交往和实践行为,来自现实世界;大脑里的意义来源于对社会交往的记忆。现代应用语言学中的儿童语言习得研究、成人第二语言习得研究以及计算机语料库研究揭示了语言的两重性,即:语言具有可分析性(analyticity)和程式性(formulaicity)的双重属性,既以规则为基础,又以记忆为基础。西方语言哲学界和语言学界一般仅注

意前者(可分析性和规则)而忽视后者(程式性和记忆),而恰恰是后者告诉我们个体的语言知识在发展的最初阶段始于对交际语境的记忆,仅有程式和程式的交际功能,没有语法的规则,也没有单个的词汇。语法和词汇的知识是从无数程式的使用和记忆、无数次交际实践的过程中抽象而来的。

按照这一观点,语言(无论母语还是外语)的学习和掌握也同样不能离开社会的交往和实践,而掌握语言的内在规则(如语法等)仅仅是语言学习中极小的一个部分,是语言学习成功的结果而不是其前提。西方语言哲学中的多数流派和理论对社会交往和实践没有予以足够的重视,因而也不能正确回答有关意义、有关语言起源和发展的问题。所以,我们在介绍西方语言学理论的时候应该关注其背后的哲学流派,关注其对哲学基本问题的回答。

本书的讨论集中在西方语言哲学中与现代语言学、应用语言学密切相关的流派上。欧洲大陆派哲学包括批评学派、后结构主义学派等对语言作了大量的研究,但其影响主要是在文学批评方面,对西方主流的理论语言学、应用语言学没有多少影响(尽管欧洲大陆派对批评性语言学及批评性语篇分析学派有相当的影响,但该学派在中国的影响相对较小),因此本书不涉及欧洲大陆派哲学,而是集中讨论对现代西方语言学有重大影响的属于英美分析派传统的语言哲学。即使是对分析派传统的语言哲学,本书亦不一一涉及,而将集中讨论那些对现代语言学理论有重要影响的学派。

本书用英语写成,有助于英语专业的研究生和教师提高英语语言水平,增强阅读西方语言哲学原著的能力,因而可以用作高等院校英语语言文学专业硕士和博士研究生的教材和参考文献。

评介西方语言哲学界对意义、指称的争论,特别是评介 20 世纪的"语言学转向",时间跨度大、涉及人物多,本书在介绍各个理论观点时难以大量参阅有关资料和原著,难以做到既准确简洁,又避免偏颇之处。欢迎读者对书中疏漏提出批评。

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PART ONE

Early Development

Unit 1   Language in Ancient Chinese Philosophy

If it is difficult to know when humans started to use language, it is not much easier to know when they started to practice philosophy. No one can tell when our ancestors started to ponder over abstract issues of existence, reality, knowledge, goodness and so on. Whenever they started, however, a large part of their reflection would have been on language, its nature, role, growth, and the mechanisms that make it work. It is indeed the case that language was important in both the Chinese and Greek philosophical traditions.

Language in Confucianism

It is said that theory of language is a key part of Classical Chinese thought. With limited space, it is only possible to look at Confucianism as an example, rather than provide an extensive review of ancient Chinese philosophy.

One may make a case for saying that Confucius (551 – 479 B. C.) was, among other things, a philosopher of language since the role of language, or, the role of names, occupied an important place in the thinking of this ancient Chinese sage. To put it briefly, he proposed the adjustment of what is real in accordance with what is ideal, and the ideal, to him, is encapsulated in names. This is demonstrated by two anecdotes in *The Analects*, the book his

students compiled and published on the basis of their notes of his teachings and remarks.

> Anecdote 1: Once a disciple (Zilu) asked Confucius what he would do first if he were to rule a state — all his life, he dreamed of working as a state minister. He replied, "The one thing needed first is the **rectification of names** (正名)." A literal interpretation of the phrase "rectification of names" is making actualities (实) agree with their names (名). That is to say, each name has particular implications for the real life object it stands for (or, its actuality), and rectification means that these objects should be made to accord with the implications of their names. The ruler of a state should set right, in thought and in reality, that which has been confused and distorted.

> Anecdote 2: A duke once asked Confucius what was the right principle of government. He replied succinctly, "Let the ruler be ruler, the subject be subject; let the father be father and the son be son." This is the same idea of the rectification of names. In each clause here, the first "ruler," "subject," "father" or "son" is an individual found in real life, an actuality; the second is the name, carrying with it all the implications of what it stands for. With the rectification of names, an individual, whether a sovereign, a minister, a father or a son, should know his place — women had no place in Confucianism — and should act in a way that matches the social role assigned to him by his name.

Confucius was born at a time when China was undergoing profound social changes: many old aristocrats had lost their power and privileges while many untitled landowners had made their way to top positions in the court. The ideal of Confucius was to stop such chaos and establish a well-ordered society. To him, if a sovereign exercised care for his subjects and the subjects remained loyal to the sovereign, the state would be well ordered just like a family in good order. By rectification of names, he meant really rectifying society with his concept of an ideal social order. This meant, to put it bluntly, putting people in the slots to which they belonged in the social hierarchy and, more importantly, making all of them behave

themselves in these slots and be content with their lot. Critics point out that he was asking for one-sided obligation and compliance of subject to ruler, son to father, younger brother to elder brother, and women to men.

Philosophically, Confucius held that since the sanctified kings in the past like Yao and Shun (尧舜) ordained the names, these names represented the ideal order, which should not be challenged or disturbed. Therefore, people should regulate and determine their social practice and social role according to these names. In other words, reality follows language. It is not language that reflects reality but reality that should reflect language; language takes precedence over reality.

It is amazing that today, over two millennia after Confucius, we may still find some Confucian flavor in the philosophy of language in the West. Confucius saw each name as having some implications that constitute the essence of the thing or class of things to which the name applies. The name " ruler," for instance, contains in its meaning all the moral and behavioral requirements for a ruler. This view of names, as we will see, is rather similar to what is held by description theory, a very influential 20th-century approach to the meaning of words (to be discussed in **PART TWO**). Philosophers of language in the 20th-century Western world liked to play up the role of language, and this was similar to Confucius touting the role of names. As we will see, these philosophers either regarded language as the only thing in the world we hold for certain, or as capable of solving ideological disputes, or as shaping and determining our thought and practice. These scholars would love our ancient sage and his "rectification of names."

Controversies among Ancient Thinkers

Confucius' theory on the rectification of names met with important resistance from some of his near contemporaries. Mo Zi （墨子，480?- 420?B.C.），for instance, took issue with him by arguing that the standards for right or wrong (*shi* and *fei*) can only be the utility for the country and its people; they cannot be fixed in names. In other words, the meaning of names had to be explained in terms of matters in the real world; it could not regulate thought and behavior. The most direct criticism, however, came from Xun Zi （荀子，313?- 238 B. C.），who pointed out that instead of making actualities accord with their names, names were, in the first place, made to denote actualities. Names were given to things, he argued, so they are alike if things are alike, but different if things are different, and the use of a name to designate a particular actuality is entirely arbitrary. Anachronistically, we may capture his point with a Shakespearean phrase: a rose by any other name smells just as sweet. "No names are necessarily appropriate themselves," Xun Zi claimed. For him, such arbitrariness is lost only after the naming takes place. With this school of learning, as we can see, the picture is completely reversed: language reflects reality, and reality takes precedence over language. What we have here is a commonsense realist view many of us would share. The only thing is that many philosophers do not like to pay much attention to such reasoning; it is too commonsensical to hit the headlines.

There were also near-contemporaries of Confucius who reinterpreted the theory of rectification of names. The Legalists （法家），for instance, differed from Confucius in that they sided with the upstarts during that period of change and chaos. In their interpretation, the doctrine meant holding actualities accountable for their names; that is to say, the "rulers" in power should attach particular names to individual functionaries of various levels of officialdom and hold those functionaries accountable for carrying

out the duties designated by the names of their posts. With the Legalists, what was an important political, ideological doctrine of Confucius became a trick of government, a strategy for consolidating political power. For them, while names should still regulate people's behavior as in Confucianism, those names were no longer passed down from the sanctified kings in the past but were made by the rulers themselves.

The battle over the role of language was prolonged and complicated. Many other schools of thought and individuals also participated in the battle. One of them, for example, was Gongsun Long （公孙龙, 320? - 250? B. C.）, from the School of Names （名家）, who was well-known for his paradoxical claim that "White horse is not horse," the interpretation of which remains controversial to this day.

The purpose of the brief discussion here is not to do justice to the philosophical polemics of 2,000 years ago. Rather, it is to show the importance of language in Chinese philosophy. Although this manuscript focuses on Western thought, language is not only a subject of Western philosophy. It would probably merit a separate manuscript to give a full account of the philosophy of language in ancient China.

# Unit 2   Language in Ancient Greek Philosophy

The motto "publish or perish" is a modern phenomenon. Confucius only published one book during his lifetime, *The Spring and Autumn Annals*. His students put out *The Analects* years after his death; it is made up entirely of the dialogues Confucius had with his students and others. We can find parallels in the West.

In ancient Athens, Greece, about the same time as Confucius, the great thinker Socrates （470 - 399 B. C.） had never published

anything when he was killed at the age of 70. Perhaps the only thing we know about him is the remark he made towards the end of his trial: "An unexamined life is not worth living." It was his student Plato who collected and wrote up his teachings and titled them *Dialogues*, so called because all but one of these thirty or so pieces of writing were exchanges of ideas that Socrates had with his students. It is clear that in these *Dialogues*, Plato said a lot through the mouth of his teacher, and for this reason, the publication came out under the name of Plato. Also for this reason, when we discuss Plato's ideas today, we can be certain that Socrates himself also had a part at least in shaping some of his students' ideas.

Socrates
(469 - 399 B.C.)
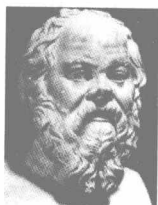
Socrates(/ˈsɒkrətiːz/) left no literary legacy of his own. He was born into a sculptor's family, and he had the experience of serving as a soldier and working as a stonemason as a young man.

During his teaching, he liked to hold dialogues with students, questioning their unwarranted belief in popular opinions, even though he often offered no alternative views. He was also known for his disdain for material wealth and for refusing to accept payment for his teaching. Despite his popularity among students, wealthy parents were often displeased with his influence on their offspring. Three Athenians accused him of corrupting the youth and interfering with the religion of the city, and since he refused to renounce his philosophy, the court ordered him to kill himself by drinking hemlock (i.e., water in which this poisonous plant had been soaked). He died in the company of his friends and disciples.