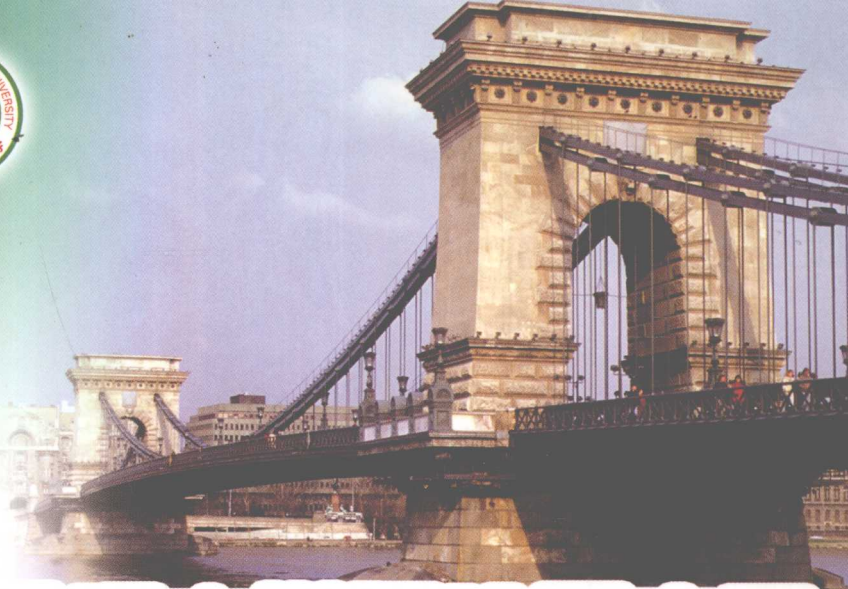




现代语言学理论及应用

Modern Linguistic Theory and Its Applications

王丹 编著

东北林业大学出版社

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Preface

Linguistic science, which has a great influence on foreign language teaching and learning, has developed very rapidly. Books on this subject number in hundreds. Courses on linguistic science are very common in colleges and universities. This course will extend half of academic year, consisting of two hours' lecture per week. The course is intended for senior students whose major is English and for students who have no previous knowledge of linguistics.

This course is scheduled for one semester with two contact hours per week; therefore it is restricted to give the most fundamental principles and practices of modern linguistics. The aim of the course is to give you a grounding of the nature of language, the internal structure and development of language. In the courses of the lectures, the theoretical study will be introduced, including phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics and also we will cover language change, language and society, language and culture. At the end of the course, the lecture on linguistics and Foreign Language Teaching is provided. In preparing this book I have drawn heavily on source materials from a variety of publications at home and abroad. At the end of each chapter are topics for discussions, which are designed to help the students check and reinforce the knowledge they have gained from their course work. Hopefully, those of you who will pursue M. A degree will be your guidance in studying linguistics, and those who will not further study will also benefit from the basic course.

Wang Dan
May, 2004

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1 The Nature of Language

In this chapter, we will cover five aspects.

- 1. What does language mean?**
- 2. What is language?**
- 3. Design features**
- 4. Functions of language**
- 5. The origin of language**

We use language every day and we live in a world of words. When people communicate each other, no matter in what ways, they use language. Indeed, language is most essential to mankind. The possession of language can distinguish humans from animals. However, we don't know how exactly we acquire language. We don't understand precisely the relationships between language and thought, language and logic, or language and culture, we don't know how and when language originated. One reason for this inadequate knowledge of language is that we as language users take too many things for granted. Language comes to us so naturally that few of us need to stop and question what language is. During the study, we shall see language is far more complex than most people have imagined.

Linguistics is a branch of science, which takes language as its object of investigation. So we should study from the nature of language.

1.1 What does language mean?

Not many people would stop and think what meanings the ordinary word “language” has. In fact, it involves several different senses.

1.1.1 It means what a person says or said

Look at the following example:

“What he said sounds reasonable enough, but he expressed himself in such bad **language** that many people misunderstood him.” Here “language” refers to the concrete act of speaking in a given situation.

1.1.2 It refers to the whole of a person’s language

Language can refer to the whole of a person’s language. For example: “Shakespeare’s language”, “Luxun’s language”, and “Faulkner’s language”. In this case, it is an individual’s personal dialect, which is called idiolect.

1.1.3 It means a particular variety or level of speech or writing

Language means a particular variety or level of speech or writing.

For example: scientific language, formal language, trade language and colloquial language.

1.1.4 It refers to the abstract system

Language can refer to the abstract system.

For example: “Do you know French?”, “the English language” and “the Chinese language”.

1.1.5 It refers to the common features of all human languages

Language refers to the common features of all human languages.

“He studies language.” means he studies the universal properties of all speech/writing systems, not just one particular language.

1.2 What is language?

It is very difficult to give a satisfactory definition. Sapir, American linguist, wrote in 1921.

“Language is a purely human and non-instinctive method communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols.”

Chomsky, American linguist, gave the definition in 1957:

“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.”

What they say is nothing about communicative function. They both have limitations.

Most of linguists accept a tentative definition like the following:

Language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication.

How can you understand this definition? The answers are as followed:

1.2.1 Language is a system

Elements of language are combined according to rules. For example: “bilk” is not a possible sound combination in English, and also “been he

wounded has” is not an acceptable sentence in English.

1.2.2 Language is arbitrary

No intrinsic connection between the word “pen” and the thing we use to write with. Different languages have different sounds (words) for the same object.

For example: book in English, livre in French, 本 in Japanese, check (切克) in Korean.

1.2.3 Words are symbols

They are associated with objects, actions, ideas by convention. This 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.”

1.2.4 Language is vocal

Because the primary medium is sound for all languages. All evidence points to the fact that writing systems came into being much later than the spoken form. For example: Children acquire spoken language before they can read or write.

1.2.5 Language is human specific

Language is human specific, that is, it is different from the communication systems like bird singing and bee dancing.

1.3 Design features

Design features refer to the defining properties of human language

that distinguish it from any animal system of communication. By comparing language with animal communication system, we can have a better understanding of the nature of language.

1.3.1 Arbitrariness

There is no logical connection between meanings and sounds. A dog might be a pig if only the first person or group of persons had used it for a pig. But language is not absolutely arbitrary. There are cases where there seems to be some association between sounds and meanings in every language. There are certain sounds which imitate natural sounds such as bang, crash in English, *dingdang* (叮当), *putong* (扑通) in Chinese. They are onomatopoeic words (拟声词).

Some compound words are words that have certain association between sounds and meaning.

For example: "type" and "write" forms typewriter; "photo" and "copy" forms photocopy.

1.3.2 Duality

Language is a system and has two sets of structures, or two levels. The lower or the basic level is a structure of sounds, which are meaningless. But the sounds of language can be grouped or regrouped into a large number of units of meaning such as words, which are found at the higher level of the system. For example, the grouping of the three sounds [k] [p] [a] can mean (park). Then the units at the higher level can be arranged and rearranged into an infinite number of sentences. This feature enables its users to talk about anything within their knowledge. No animal communication system has it.

1.3.3 Productivity

User can understand and produce sentences they have never heard before. Much of them, we hear for the first time there seems no problem of understanding.

For example: A red-eyed elephant is dancing on the hotel bed with an African gibbon.

A three-eyed white monkey is sleeping soundly on the bed of the king of France.

None of those who have heard had difficulty in understanding. Productivity is unique to human language. Bee dancing is used only to indicate food sources, which is the only kind of message that can be sent through dancing. Different from artistic creativity, productivity never goes outside the language also called “rule—bound creativity” (by N. Chomsky).

“This is the man that owns the cat that killed the rat that ate the fish that lives in the house that Jack built . . .” is another example to show language’s creativity.

1.3.4 Displacement

It can refer to real and unreal things of the present or the past or the future. In other words, language can refer to contexts removed from the immediate situations of the speaker.

For example, when a man is crying to a woman about something, it might be something that had occurred, or something that is occurring, or something that is to occur. When a dog is barking, you can decide it is barking for something or at someone that exists now and there. It couldn’t be how-wow-ing sorrowfully for some lost love or a bone to be lost.

1.3.5 Cultural transmission

Language is not biologically transmitted from generation to generation. Animal calls are genetically transmitted.

For instance, cats, dogs and bees must produce the same sounds with those of the same species. With human beings, things are different. A Chinese speaker and an English speaker are both able to use a language, but they are not mutually intelligible. This shows that language is culturally transmitted. It is passed from one generation to the next by teaching and learning. If a human is brought up in isolation, he cannot acquire language. For instance, the wolf child reared by the pack of wolves turned out to speak the wolf's roaring when he was saved. In Chinese, we say “随虎学虎啸, 跟猪学猪哼”.

1.3.6 Interchangeability

It means that any human being can be both a producer and a receiver of messages. Men and women may say different things in principle. There is no sound, or word or sentence that a man can utter and a woman can not or vice versa. On the other hand, a person can be the speaker while the other speaker is the listener and as the turn moves on to the listener. Some male birds utter some calls, which females do not.

When a dog barks, all the neighboring dogs bark. Then people around can hardly tell which dog is “speaking” and which is “listening”.

All of these features show language is human-specific.

1.4 Functions of language

1.4.1 Phatic

Phatic function refers to language being used for setting up a certain atmosphere or maintaining social contact rather than for exchanging information or ideas. Greetings, farewells, and comments on weather in English and on clothing in Chinese all serve this function. e.g. "*How are you?*", "*Fine, thanks.*", "*A nice day, isn't it?*". If you don't say "*Hello*" to a friend you meet, or if you don't answer his "*Hi*", you ruin your friendship.

1.4.2 Directive

Directive function means that language may be used to get the hearer to do something. Most imperative sentence performs this function, e.g. "*Tell me the result when you finish*".

According to J. Austin and J. Searle's "indirect speech act theory" serve this purpose.

For example: "If I were you, I would have blushed to the bottom of my ears."

1.4.3 Informative

We often tell something, characterized by the use of declarative sentence. Informative statements are often judged as either true or false. e.g. "*Water boils at 212 degree Fahrenheit*" is a true statement. While "*Gold melts at 300 degrees Fahrenheit*" is false.

1.4.4 Interrogative

When language is used to get information from others, it serves an interrogative function; this includes all questions what expert answers. e.g. “*When did he arrive ?*”, “*What is it like?*”, “*What do you think of it?*”.

1.4.5 Expressive

Expressive function is the use of language to reveal something about the feelings and attitudes of the speaker. The simplest examples are ejaculations like “*Good heavens!*”, “*My God !*”.

“I’m extremely sorry about ...”

“We’re most grateful for this.”

1.4.6 Evocative

Evocative function is the use of language to create certain feelings in the hearer. Its aim is to amuse, startle, anger, worry, or please. Jokes are designed to amuse or entertain the audience; advertising is devised to urge customers to buy the mentioned goods; propaganda aims to influence public opinion.

1.4.7 Performative

Language is also used to “do things”, to perform actions. e.g. at a meeting, as soon as the chairman says “*I declare the meeting open*”, the meeting has started. If the president says, “*I declare war*”, then war exists between two countries.

When the judge says “*I sentence you to ten years of hard labor*”, then hard labour starts.

1.5 The origin of language

The origin of language is still a mystery. Scholars over the centuries have been interested in it because man and language are so closely related that they believed that if we knew how and when language originated, we would probably know how and when man arose as well. However, it is extremely difficult to know how language came into being, for example, man has existed at least one million years and the earliest written records are only six thousand years old. These records provide no clue at all to the beginning of language. Moreover, the only evidence we have about ancient languages is writing. Speech is much earlier so the earliest spoken form is lost. Consequently, all the theories about the origin of language is hypothetical in nature.

1.5.1 The divine-origin theory

Language is a gift from God to mankind. e. g. Egyptians would believe that the creator of speech was the god Nabu. Basically people used to think that language had the power to make things happen. If one uttered a curse that a person would be struck by lightning, the person would surely die a violent death. In China, e. g. it was taboo to speak of “sinking” and “overturn” on a ship.

Because these words were believed to have the magic to turn the ship over. These myths and superstitions can never become scientific claim.

1.5.2 The invention theory

Many people think that man invented language, but their explanations take different forms.