

实用普通语言学引论

PRACTICAL INTRODUCTION TO GENERAL LINGUISTICS

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哈尔滨地图出版社

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· 哈尔滨 ·

图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据

实用普通语言学引论/ 王国华, 曲英梅主编. —哈尔滨:
哈尔滨地图出版社, 2007. 1

ISBN 978-7-80717-634-3

I. 实… II. ①王…②曲…III. 普通语言学 IV. H0

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2007) 第 086913 号

哈尔滨地图出版社出版发行

(地址: 哈尔滨市南岗区测绘路 2 号 邮编: 150086)

齐齐哈尔市慧达印刷厂印刷

开本: 787 mm×1 092 mm 1/16 印张: 10.25 字数: 250 千字

ISBN 978 - 7-80717-634-3

2007 年 1 月第 1 版 2007 年 1 月第 1 次印刷

印数: 1~300 定价: 24.00 元

前言

现代语言学呈现出流派众多、分支精细、学科日趋专门化的特点，不同的学派在理论观点和方法论上有较大的差别，有的甚至在同一概念、原理解释上大相径庭。这些无疑是初学者学习和掌握语言学知识的一大障碍。加之国内大多数语言学书籍出自英文原著，专业性强、语言艰涩难懂、内容庞杂、知识点分散，经常导致学生“望文生畏”，不利于他们全面、整体地把握本学科。

鉴于此，本书以《高等学校英语专业教学大纲》《高校英语专业八级考试大纲》（2004版）人文知识的要求为纲，以历届专八人文知识试题及各高校英语专业历届硕士入学考试真题中的考点为目，点面结合、由浅入深、由简到繁，简明扼要地介绍了现代语言学基础知识及前沿发展领域。编写上尽可能用比较通俗的语言来复述，来综合、整理、对比不同流派对某一语言问题的观点、学说。目的不在于说服读者相信某一派别而是帮助读者扩大视野了解语言学概貌，系统理解语言学理论，培养学习兴趣和自主学习的能力。

本书适用于英语专业在校生、英语专业自考生、其他语言学爱好者及有关学科的教师。尤其书中的练习题多数来自专八及全国各高校历届英语专业硕士入学考试真题，在巩固知识、深化记忆的同时，对备考英语专业的研究生无疑提供了有益的练兵活动，从而，把课堂讲授与实战有机地结合起来。

在编写过程中我们参考了大量国内外相关的语言学论著与期刊文献，在此向这些作者们表示由衷的谢意。具体编写安排是：王国华负责第2、6章的编写，曲英梅负责第3、8章的编写，国春燕负责第1、4章及第5第4节的编写，国洪丹负责第5、9章的编写，陈彦梅负责第7章的编写。最后由王国华统稿。

由于时间仓促，编者水平有限，书中定有疏漏和错误之处，恳请专家同仁批评指正，便于以后进一步修改提高。

编者

2007年1月

List of College Abbreviations

BLCU	Beijing Language and Culture University
BISU	Beijing International Studies University
BNU	Beijing Normal University
HNU	Harbin Normal University
LNU	Liaoning Normal University
ShDU	Shandong University

目 录

Chapter one Language and Linguistics	1
1.1 What is language?.....	1
1.1.1 Design features of human language.....	3
1.1.2 Functions of language.....	6
1.1.3 Origin of language.....	7
1.2 What is linguistics?.....	8
1.2.1 Fundamental distinctions in linguistics.....	8
1.2.2 Scope of linguistics.....	11
1.2.3 Characteristics of modern linguistics.....	12
Study Questions:.....	12
Chapter Two Phonetics.....	15
2.1 Speech sounds	15
2.1.1 Sound segments.....	15
2.1.2 Transcription of speech sounds	15
2.2 Division of phonetics	16
2.3 Classification and description of speech sounds.....	17
2.3.1 Voicing.....	17
2.3.2 Classification and description of English consonants.....	18
2.3.3 Classification and description of vowels	22
2.3.4 Natural classes of speech sounds.....	24
Study Questions:.....	25
Chapter Three Phonology.....	28
3.1 The study of sound systems and patterns	28
3.2 Phonemes, phones and allophones.....	28
3.3 Discovering phonemes	30
3.3.1 Minimal pairs and sets	30
3.3.2 Contrastive distribution	30
3.3.3 Complementary distribution.....	31
3.3.4 Free variation	31
3.3.5 The discovery procedure.....	31
3.4 Distinctive features and non-distinctive features	32
3.5 Phonological rules.....	33
3.6 Syllables and clusters	33
3.7 Prosodic phonology and suprasegmental phonology	34
Study questions:	36

Chapter Four Morphology	39
4.1 Morphemes	39
4.1.1 Morpheme, morph and allomorph	39
4.1.2 Classification of morphemes	40
4.2 Morphological process of word-formation	44
4.2.1 Compounding	45
4.2.2 Derivation	46
4.2.3 Conversion	46
4.2.4 Other ways of word-formation	47
Study questions:	49
Chapter Five Syntax — Sentence patterns	51
5.1 The traditional approach	52
5.2 The structural approach	53
5.3 The generative approach	55
5.3.1 Tenets of generative grammar	56
5.3.2 Generative approach	59
5.4 Functional approach	70
5.4.1 Systemic grammar	71
5.4.2 Functional grammar	74
Study questions:	78
Chapter Six Semantics	80
6.1 The meaning of ‘meaning’	80
6.2 Some views concerning the study of meaning	81
6.2.1 The naming theory	81
6.2.2 The conceptualist view	81
6.2.3 Contextualism	82
6.2.4. Behaviorism	83
6.3 The study of lexical meaning	83
6.3.1 Sense and reference	83
6.3.2 Classification of lexical meanings	84
6.3.3 Lexical Sense relations	85
6.3.4 Componential analysis of meaning	88
6.3.5 Prototype theory	89
6.4 The study of sentence meaning	89
6.4.1 Sense relations between sentences	89
6.4.2 The analysis of Sentence meaning	91
Study questions:	96
Chapter Seven Discourse Analysis	99

7.1	Historical development of discourse analysis	99
7.2	Definition of discourse analysis	100
7.3	Basic framework for the study of discourse	101
7.3.1	Language as system and as activity	101
7.3.2	Language use with purpose and function	103
7.3.3	Language in situation	104
7.4	Cohesion	107
7.4.1	Reference	108
7.4.2	Ellipsis	110
7.4.3	Conjunction	110
7.4.4	Lexical cohesion	111
7.5	Coherence	111
7.6	Schema Theory	112
	Study questions:	114
Chapter Eight Pragmatics		116
8.1	What is pragmatics?	116
8.1.1	Context	116
8.1.2	Scope of pragmatics	117
8.2	Deixis	118
8.2.1	Defining deixis	118
8.2.2	Types of deixis	119
8.3	Conversational analysis	119
8.3.1	Conversational implicature	120
8.3.2	Conversational principles	122
8.4	Speech act theory	123
8.5	Presuppositions	126
8.6	Politeness Principle (PP)	126
8.7	Communication and relevance	129
8.8	Conversation analysis	130
	Study questions:	133
Chapter Nine Language Culture and Society		136
9.1	Relationship between language and culture	136
9.1.1	Sapir-Whorf hypothesis	138
9.1.2	Culture in language teaching classroom	140
9.2	Language and society	140
9.2.1	Relationship between language and society	140
9.2.2	About sociolinguistics	142
9.2.3	Some basic methodological concern	143

9.2.4	Sociolects.....	144
9.2.5	Idiolect.....	148
9.2.6	Style, register and jargon	148
	Study questions:	150
	Bibliography	152

Chapter one Language and Linguistics

1.1 What is language?

When we study human language, we are approaching what some might call the "human essence," the distinctive qualities of mind that are, so far as we know, unique to man.

Noam Chomsky, *Language and mind*

We live in a world of language. We talk to our friends, our wives and husbands, our lovers and our colleagues. We talk to our pets and sometimes to ourselves. We also talk when there is no one to answer. Even in our dreams we talk or are talked to. The possession of language, perhaps more than any other attribute, contributes the uniqueness of human species. The use of language is so natural and so extensive to all people that we rarely consider language as an interesting subject worthy of study. Language seems to be a simple phenomenon, like air, permeates every aspect of our life, and we often take it for granted. However, the power of language indeed is so great that the progress human beings have made so far really owe a great debt to the fact that human beings can speak. The Bible, in Genesis, chapter 11 tells us that When knowing our Plans to build a tower that of Babel, up to Heaven, God felt obliged to restrict our power by Putting an end to our common language.

And the Lord said, Behold, the People is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

In short, the nature of human beings and the dominance of the way of life we lead are due very large part to the fact that human beings can speak.

It is important that before we embark on our study of language we have a clear understanding of what we mean by the term language. Our first response might be that language relates to communication between human beings and not to communication between animals. That is certainly a useful first step towards a definition, but the multi-facet nature of language makes it terribly hard. A perfect and comprehensive definition of language is impossible. Many linguists try to define language from different perspective, but each definition seems to capture only a part of this very complex phenomenon. For example, language can be defined at least in the following ways.

Edward Sapir gave a definition in a book published in 1921. He supported the idea that language relates to communication between human beings, and he considers language as 'non-instinctive' and 'voluntarily produced'. Thus for him language does not include such instinctive forms of communication as smiling and cries of pain. His definition is as follows:

Language is purely human and non-instinctive method of communication ideas,

emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols.

In this tradition, language is generally considered to be a form of communication between human beings by means of a system of symbols which are principally transmitted by vocal sounds.

Another different idea is that language is that human beings speak language instinctively just like birds flying with wings. Steven Pinker uses the word “instinct” to embody the essence of human language.

Whether one considers language to be instinctive or not depends on what one is talking about. Language is instinctive in so far as we are all born with a predisposition to speak, we all acquire a language without tuition and when we speak we do not consciously convert our thought into speech. Language is, however, non-instinctive in that we can choose what to say or whether to say anything at all.

In this book, we look at language primarily as a type of social interaction, a tool for communication and creating meaning among people. In linguistics, this is functionalism oriented. Approaching language from a sociological perspective, we are primarily interested in the various activities in which people engage. Within this approach, there are two important ways of conceptualizing language: language as system and language as activity.

Language as system refers to all of the knowledge and information about a language that resides in our brains. The system can be thought of as language potential; that is, we have the ability to use any of it, but of course we cannot use all of it at once. Rather, the system contains all of the things that we could say at a given time.

A dictionary would be one example of language as system as it attempts to describe the words of a language by recording them in a list with definitions. We should point out, however, that the system speakers of a language hold in their heads includes much more information than that found in the dictionary. The mental system also includes such information as which words combine with each other (for example the fact that we often say *to hold a meeting* and *to perform an operation*, but not **to perform a meeting* or **to hold an operation*)¹. In any case the system we hold in our minds is much more complex than any book. In fact, no one has yet been able to describe all of the information that it contains.

Note that a foreign language class teaches us bits and pieces, but its ultimate goal is to give us knowledge of the entire language and to hold its system in our minds. After all, when we say that so and so speaks good English, we mean he or she is in good command of the whole system.

Language as activity refers not to the ability in our minds, but to the actions that we do with language at a given moment. In our everyday lives we do not use the whole of language. Rather, we use whatever bits and pieces seem most appropriate to the situation. An essay we

¹ in this book, we will follow the general convention in linguistics of putting an asterisk * before expressions which are not considered well-formed uses of language

write might be two pages, ten pages, or much longer, but it could never use all the words we have in our vocabulary (let alone all those in the dictionary).

Imagine that you are walking across campus and run into a professor who gave you a bad grade last semester. Perhaps you will reluctantly say “Hi” and hurry off. As brief as it is, this is a complete example of one use of language as activity.

A key concept relation to language, both as system and as activity, is that of discourse, which is what linguists call the language used in our interactions with other people. Most social activities involve using language and therefore include discourse as a component. Discourse always carries out specific functions in person-to-person encounters, the kind we have zillions of each day. Thus discourse often takes place in whatever we do with other people, whether it is a primarily language-based activity such as shouting, chatting, lecturing or writing, or a non-linguistic activity such as gazing, whistling or even fist fighting, which is often accompanied by language use.

Language use is social even if those you are engaging with are not present with you. When writing an essay or an e-mail in a room by yourself, you have to project the readers’ probable reaction to what you put down on paper or on the computer screen. This is a discourse activity. At this moment when you are reading this textbook, you may ask yourself: exactly what is the author trying to tell me? This, also, is a discourse activity.

Language as system is our reserve. We draw on this reserve when we engage in discourse and create language as activity. Therefore, discourse has a dual nature, going between the system and the activity.

By now we have a general idea about language, and then what are the specific properties that attribute language such a power?

1.1.1 Design features of human language

It has been well accepted that language is one of the most important attributes that distinguish Human beings from animals. Language is unique to human species, in other words, it possesses design features specific to human beings.

(1) Arbitrariness

It is generally the case that there is no ‘natural’ connection between a linguistic form and its meaning. You cannot look at a word, for example, the English *dog*, and determine from its shape that it has a natural meaning. The linguistic form has no natural or ‘iconic’ relationship with that four-legged barking object out in the world. Recognizing this general fact about language leads us to conclude that a property of linguistic signs is their arbitrary relationship with the objects they are used to indicate. The forms of human language demonstrate a property called arbitrariness: they do not, in any way, ‘fit’ the objects they denote. This is perhaps why Shakespeare says *a rose by any other name would smell sweet as well*. For another example, the same sound may express different meanings, /rait/, may be represented as *write*, *right* and *rite*. On the other hand, different languages may have

different sounds to represent the same object that exists in society. The word of such an object as a house is *fangzi* in Chinese, *maison* in French, *dom* in Russian, *Haus* in German.

There are, of course, some words in language which have sounds which seem to 'echo' the sounds of objects or activities. English examples might be *cuckoo*, *Crash*, *slurp*, *squelch* or *whirr*, which are onomatopoeic. In most languages, however, these onomatopoeic words are relatively rare, and different languages use different words to imitate the same natural sounds. The vast majority of linguistic expressions are in fact arbitrary.

Still there is an interesting fact in Chinese, that is, some written symbols may directly reflect the entities they represent without the medium of sound, presenting the impression that there exists a direct relationship between the symbol and the referent. Examples may be such characters as 马, 牛, 鱼. However such characters are pronounced, they resemble the animals they represent in the real world. Though this is considered as part of the humanistic characteristic of the Chinese language, examples are still rare compared with the vast majority of characters. For example, 妈 (mother) is not necessarily a female horse. Language at this point is still predominantly arbitrary.

As 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, each variety of animal communication consists of a fixed and limited set of (vocal or gestural) forms. Many of these forms are used only in specific situations (e.g. establishing territory) and at particular times (e.g. during the mating season). As far as mating is concerned, the human seems to behave as if it is always open season, and the range and frequent novelty of linguistic expressions used in connection with that activity may provide evidence for another property of human language, normally described as 'productivity'.

(2) Duality

Human language operates on two levels of structure. At one level are elements which have no meaning in themselves but which combine to form units at another level which do have meanings. This organization of language into two levels, a lower level of sounds combining into a higher level of larger units, is known as duality of language. So, at one level, we have distinct sounds, and, at another level, we have distinct meanings. The advantage of duality lies in the great productive power of human language, since with a limited set of distinct sounds we are capable of producing a very large number of sound combinations (e.g. words) which are distinct in meaning. And this huge number of words can form unlimited number of sentences. From duality we can notice that language is highly hierarchical.

Languages differ widely in the degree and the kind of correspondence between their sound and spelling systems. The very fact that duality can operate with both spoken sounds

and written letters in human language is itself a feature of its flexibility. No animal communication appears to have exploited other media to develop alternative delivery system in this way. It is obvious that, although many animals may be able to produce special calls like *woof*, *meow* etc., these units have meanings but cannot be further divided into discrete sounds. If your dog could operate on two levels, then you might expect to hear *oowf* and even *foow*, each with different meanings, consequently the communicative power of animals is very limited.

(3) Creativity

It is a feature of all languages that novel utterances are continually being created. Child can produce utterances which he or she has never heard before. Adults, When new situations arise or new objects have to be described, manipulate their linguistic resources to produce new expressions and new sentences. This property of language has been termed creativity or productivity or open-endedness. It is an aspect of language which is linked to the fact that the potential number of utterances in any human language is infinite.

Non-human signaling, on the other hand, appears to have little flexibility. Cicadas have four signals to choose from and vervet monkeys have about thirty-six vocal calls (including the noises for vomiting and sneezing). Nor does it seem possible for animals to produce “new” signals to communicate novel experiences or events. The worker bee, normally able to communicate the location of a nectar source, will fail to do so if the location is really ‘new’. In one experiment, a hive of bees was placed at the foot of a radio tower and a food source at the top. Ten bees were taken to the top, shown the food source, and sent off to tell the rest of the hive about their find. The message was conveyed via a bee dance and the whole gang buzzed off to get the free food. They flew around in all directions, but couldn’t locate the food. (it is probably one way to make bees really mad.) the problem may be that bee communication regarding location has a fixed set of signals, all of which relate to horizontal distance. The bee cannot manipulate its communication system to create a ‘new’ message indicating vertical distance. According to Karl von Frisch, who conducted the experiment, ‘the bees have no words for *up* in their language’. Moreover, they cannot invent one.

The problem seems to be that animal signals have a feature called fixed reference. Each signal is fixed as relating to a particular object or occasion. Among the vervet monkey’s repertoire, there is one danger signal *CHUTTER*, which is used when a snake is around, and another *RRAUP*, used when an eagle comes by. These signals are fixed in terms of their reference and cannot be manipulated. What would count as evidence of productivity in the monkey’s communication system would be the utterance of something like a *CHUTT-RRAUF* type of signal when a flying creature that looked like a snake came by. That is, the monkey would be capable of manipulating its ‘language’ to cope with the new situation. Unfortunately, we have no evidence that the monkey could produce a new danger

signal. The human, given similar circumstances, is quite capable of creating a new 'signal', after initial surprise, by uttering something along the lines of *Wow, I don't believe it, an eagle-snake!*

(4) Displacement

Displacement means that human languages enable their users to symbolize objects, events and concepts which are not present at the moment of communication. Language can be used to refer to things real or imagined, past, present or future. When we listen to news broadcast, we know what has happened far and wide in the world. What we can speak is not limited by time and space. Displacement benefits human beings by giving them the power to handle generalizations and abstractions. This feature of language is due to the fact that the human brain is specially structured for language and the brains of other species are not comparable in terms of the capacities of memory and abstraction.

(5) Cultural transmission

Animal communication systems are generally genetically transmitted. That is, animals are born with the capacity to produce the set of calls peculiar to their species. Admittedly, the capacity for language has a genetic basis, but the particular language a person acquires or learns is a cultural fact, not a biological fact, though some linguist like Givon proposes that language is not social but biological. A language is arbitrary and conventional; a child can only acquire his mother tongue through interacting with people around them.

(6) Reflexibility

We can describe our language themselves with our languages. The language used to talk about language is called metalanguage. When linguists write grammars or lexicographers compile dictionaries they must use metalanguage. When we teach languages as a subject we also have to use it. No evidence exists that any other species write grammars or compile dictionaries or teach the communication system to outsiders. This feature of language is called reflexivity or the metalingual function of language. We can use the word book to talk about a book, and I can also use the expression the word book to talk about the sign "book" itself. For instance, to organize any written text into a coherent whole, writers employ certain expressions to keep their readers informed about where they are going. This makes the language infinitely self-reflexive: We human beings can talk about talk and think about thinking.

Of course, many other characteristics have been observed by linguists, but the above are more striking, especially the first two. Although some animal communication systems possess, to a very limited degree, these are universal features possessed by all human languages.

1.1.2 Functions of Language

What role language plays in our life? This is a question has been discussed by many linguists. Language can be used as the means of communication. It has the informative

function, phatic function, performative function, emotive function and recreational function. All these functions are specific, but the specific function can not be exhausted. Halliday discusses language function in a very general way. According to M.A.K. Halliday (1994), language plays three metafunctions simultaneously.

(1) The ideational function

When we use language to identify things, to think, or to record information, we use language as a medium that links a person with the world. Everything in mind exists through language. The ideational function is, then, the function language plays in human cognition, in our conceptualization of the world. It is this function of language, in a sense, that brings the world into our mind.

(2) The interpersonal function

In addition to using language to conceptualize the world, we use it as a medium to get along in a community. We use it to identify ourselves and others, to soothe or anger someone, to argue with or to convince others, to thank or to apologize to somebody, and more importantly, to get things done together with others or by others. This function of language binds individuals together. With this function language is able to glue all members of a speech community.

(3) The textual function

In using language, we organize messages in a logical way so that they fit in with the other messages and with the wider context in which we are talking or writing. When we speak or write we usually don't confine ourselves to single phrases or sentences; we string them together to form a text. There are expressions that refer backwards and forwards or substitute for others, or link phrases or sentences. They play the role of bringing units of language into unity. What it means to communicate, to think, to be human.

1.1.3 Origin of Language

Language, man's great intellectual tool, is immensely old, precisely as old as our remotest human ancestors, for it is language that makes our species human, strikingly different from all the other animals.

There are many ideas and stories about the origin of language. Some people, especially religious people, say language was invented and given to man by God. That is, language is divine or God's gift to man. Such ideas and stories may still prevail in part of the religious world. Some believe that language was invented by man and some suggest that language developed from natural cries, or early gestures.

They have given such fancifully descriptive names as the pooh-pooh theory, the bow-wow theory, the ding-dong theory and the yo-he-ho theory. All such theories are respectively based on the notions that language was in the beginning ejaculatory, echoic (onomatopoeic), characterized by mystic appropriateness of sound to sense in contrast to being merely imitative, or made up of grunts and groans emitted in the course of group

actions and coming in time to be associated with those actions. But we adhere to the evolutionary theory that language came into being and developed together with man. In the course of evolution the highly developed apes gradually stood up and walked on their two back feet through labor for years and years. Standing up made them have a wide view of the world, and their articulatory organs developed very fast. Their brains also gradually developed. Our ancestors' articulatory organs developed and improved and their brains progressed through labor and struggle for their existence. Then their brains gradually became functionally divided, different parts controlling different activities. All this provided our ancestors with the possibility of acquiring language. After they acquired the ability of speaking there came the necessity to exchange ideas in their common labor and struggle against nature. They had reached the step that something had to be spoken to each other. Thus, language came into being. The language referred to is, of course, spoken language. As for written language, it was invented much, much later by man.

It is clear that language came into being in the course of man's development. So it would be wrong to say that man existed prior to language, since language originates and develops together with man.

1.2 What is linguistics?

"Linguistics may be defined as the scientific study of language" (Lyons, 1968). This definition succinctly pinpoints the object and methods of linguistics. The word language does not have an article, nor in the plural form. This means that linguistics studies all languages. Linguists attempt to discover the universals of human languages. However, this does not exclude the study of a certain language, or engage in contrastive studies of two or more languages. What is language? How does it work? What happens when a speaker says something and a hearer understands him? How each language is constructed and how it varies through space and changes through time? While linguists all agree on their object of study, different schools of linguistics may have different focuses, and historically, different aspects of language may be focused on.

1.2.1 Fundamental distinctions in linguistics

(1) Langue vs. parole

Ferdinand de Saussure, who has been entitled as the father of modern linguistics, distinguished the concepts of **LANGUE** and **PAROLE**. **Langue** is, on his account, a collective body of knowledge, which was acquired by all members of a community of speakers and a system which speakers in a speech community speak. **Parole** refers to utterances in this system. While **parole** constitutes the shared social code, for Saussure, the linguist's proper object is the abstract language of each speech community. In his opinion, **parole** is simply a mass of linguistic facts, too varied and confusing for systematic