丁言仁
郝克(Maurice Cogan Hauck)

英语语言学纲要

Linguistics for English Learners

英语语言学纲要
Linguistics for English Learners

丁言仁
郝克(Maurice Cogan Hauck)

Words for the Reader

The goals of this textbook are threefold:

1. To introduce basic concepts of linguistics and applied linguistics;

2. To interest English majors in this area of learning; and

3. To help them improve their English.

Largely because of the last two goals, the book tends to emphasize topics that are related to the students' learning experience but leave out or only mention in passing those with no direct implications for language learning and teaching. For instance, most schools of linguistics lay much emphasis on sentence-level grammar, but since most English majors in China do not find it particularly difficult to handle the structure of English clauses, the book only uses a small part of Chapter Two to discuss this topic. By contrast, since many students find it difficult to produce connected prose, the book provides a rather detailed introduction to discourse analysis and its implications for language learning.

In using this book as part of a course, most of the readings and homework exercises can be assigned to be done outside the class, and the class period used to take questions on the reading and discuss the exercises. Many homework questions, after all, are open-ended and do not necessarily have right or wrong answers. Each chapter ends with a section titled "For those who are still interested." This section can simply be pointed out to students as optional reading, or the teacher may want to select from it topics for in-class discussion. The criteria for topics of discussion are the same as the goals of this book. The topics should help students

learn linguistics and applied linguistics. They should also help them improve their English.

As for the assessment of student work, the teacher may follow the traditional practice of designing an exam based on the course material. An alternative that we would endorse, however, is to have students design and even conduct a research project. Such a project should ask students to reflect on their own experiences of learning English or some other foreign language, and/or to discuss issues of foreign language teaching on the basis of their personal experience and their readings of the course material. Instructions for conducting such a research project are given in Chapter Eight.

We feel deeply apologetic for not being able to come up with a complete list of references, though a partial list is given in the annotated bibliography. This bibliography is intended to indicate some of the sources which we have relied on most heavily in our writing, and also to recommend to teachers and students sources of further reading in many of the areas we have touched on.

In addition to these published sources, much of the materials in this book, especially examples and exercises, are borrowed from the lectures and courses offered over the years by Professors Alice Deakins, John Dore, Norman Gary, Michael Gregory, Clifford Hill, Frank Horowitz, Jo Anne Kleifgen, Eric Larsen, Eugene Nida, Ricardo Otheguy, and Peter Skehan. It is difficult to trace and acknowledge the sources of all the materials they have used. While this is so, we would like to take the opportunity here to express our heart-felt gratitude to these wonderful professors and to perhaps dozens of those researchers, teachers and writers whose names remain unknown but whose work has benefited and will continue to benefit us all.

Ting Yen-ren
Nanjing University

Maurice Cogan Hauck
The City University of New York

Table of Contents

Language Around Us

Why study linguistics?

Linguistics, as any dictionary will tell us, is the scientific study of language. But if you have no intention of becoming a professional linguist, you may ask the question: Why bother to take a course in the study of language? You may have heard that linguistics can get very theoretical, abstract and, to quote some students, quite boring. You may wonder what practical value all of this boring stuff could have. Does it have anything to do with learning to use English effectively?

Our answer to both of the questions in the paragraph above is: yes. Some knowledge of linguistics can be of great help in developing your ability to communicate in English. And the bonus is, it does not need to be tedious either.

In order to make linguistics meaningful and interesting, all you need to do is to bring your own experience into the study. After all, you have been studying English for almost one decade, about half your life. Your practical experience of learning this foreign language, along with your native command of Chinese, puts you in a very good position to examine various linguistic notions and theories.

For learners of a foreign language, to study linguistics is to reflect on the language we are learning and to think about the context and process by which we are learning it. It is to ask: "Wait a minute. What is this language? How does it mean what it does?

What can we do to learn it more effectively?" After all, you do not want to be an unthinking learner who simply drifts along following others. The best language learners are those who take an active role in directing their own learning and who explore the language on their own terms. Linguistics can give you the tools to do this.

The key to taking charge of your own language learning is to become an observant learner. An observant learner is able to step back and look at the learning experience from a critical distance; to analyze and raise questions about what you are learning. Being observant is essential to studying linguistics. On the other hand, studying linguistics will help you become more observant.

Observant learners of English do not limit themselves to what is presented in their textbooks. They tend to notice and explore odd and unusual corners of the language, such as the following:

Episode. The word *hippies* (based on the adjective *hip*) emerged in the late 1960s to refer to young people in the United States who opposed accepted social norms by dressing in strange clothes, wearing their hair long, living communally and taking psychedelic drugs. In the 1980s, the word *yuppies* (an acronym for "Young Urban Professionals") was developed to describe people of a similar age but dedicated to an opposite goal: the pursuit of money and high-status possessions. Note that both of these terms are somewhat critical. No one wants to admit that they are a yuppie and few would willingly describe themselves as hippies.

Some other similar words have been formed on this model, but they are not as widely used and are often a bit humorous. For example, *buppies*, or "Black Urban Professionals," are the Afro-American subset of yuppies. There is also a word *frumpies*, an abbreviation of "Formerly-Radical, Upwardly-Mobile Professionals" which refers to those "fifty-somethings" who have put their radical past

behind them and are now busy earning money.

Look these words up in your dictionary and see if they are included and, if so, what definitions are given. Then ask yourself: Do you know any other words that are similar?

Episode. English has many taboo words (also known as "swear words" or "curse words") which are not considered acceptable in polite company, but are nonetheless used by most native speakers of English at one time or another. Most of these taboo words are either religious in nature (such as *My God!* or *Jesus!*) or related to bodily functions (such as *Fuck!* or *Shit!*).

Some Christians feel offended when religious words are used to express surprise or anger (this is referred to as "Taking the Lord's name in vain.") For them, *My!* and *Jee!* which sound similar, are considered more acceptable. Similarly, people often use *Shoot!* in place of *Shit!* Instead of *Fuck!*, which is generally considered the most offensive swear word in English, people may say *Fudge!* or even a nonsense word such as *Phooey!* or *Frick!* (the latter is most often used as an adjective, in expressions such as *No frickin' way!*).

Ask yourself: What other taboo words do you know in English? Why do you think each is considered offensive? What other words might be used to substitute for each? What are the differences between taboo words in English and those in Chinese?

Episode. Becoming a careful learner of English should also make you more observant speaker of Chinese. For instance, you may know the following expressions

帅呆了	电灯泡 (for a person)
派对	前卫 (an adjective)

But do your teachers or parents use them in their speech? Why not? On the other hand, what expressions do you know that your

grandparents use but you do not?

The following expressions, in simplified Chinese characters, were used in the Jiangsu area in the 1940s. Do you know any of them?

洋龙   进馆   吱亚国

Now they do not mean anything, but in those years, they meant *fire engine*, *going to school* and *interpreter*, respectively.

The purpose of these three brief episodes has been to show you the kinds of things that observant language learners are interested in pursuing and the types of questions they are continually asking. Linguists are sharp. They could be called "language dissectors", or to be more accurate, "vivisectors"— look this word up in your dictionary — because they cut the living language apart to see how it works. This is a long way from the image you may have of linguists as ancient scholars poring over dictionaries in dusty libraries.

What is language, anyway?

Most linguistics textbooks will give a definition of language somewhere in the first chapter. Usually, this definition takes the form of a single, very long sentence. This book is an exception. We will give you no definition here. This is not because we would not like to do it — after all, a good definition might be very helpful to you as a reader. The problem is that we do not know if any one definition can do justice to the complexity of language.

Language, like air, permeates every aspect of our life. Because of this, defining it clearly in one sentence is perhaps impossible. There are many ways of defining language, but each definition seems to capture only a part of this very complex phenomenon. In

fact, which definition a person chooses tends to say more about their orientation to language than it does about language itself.

We, as the authors of this book, are no exception to this. We look at language primarily as a type of social interaction, a tool for communicating and creating meaning among people. In linguistics, this orientation is often aligned with an approach known as functionalism, one that studies language in terms of what it can do (i.e., the functions or uses to which people put it).

This is not the only way to look at language, and it may not even be the best. But we use it because it is the approach best suited to the issues we are most interested in: the nature of language learning and language teaching and the role of language in negotiating relationships among people.

If we look at language from a sociological perspective, we are primarily interested in the various activities in which people use language to interact. These include telling something, asking for something or making someone do something.

Within this approach, there are two important ways of conceptualizing language: language as system and language as activity. We will now give a brief introduction to each.

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 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 relating 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

---

[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.

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.

The three levels of language

Language is a system of symbols which create meaning. Of course there are many such systems in our world. The traffic light, which tells a driver if it is permissible to drive through an intersection by showing either a green, yellow, or red light, is a familiar example. In both language and traffic signals, the symbol itself is arbitrary. In language, English uses the word *dog*, French uses *chien*, Spanish uses *perro*, but they all refer to the same concept. This is because there is no necessary relation between the word and the idea; the connection is made by *convention*. Similarly, there is no reason that the color red tells cars to stop and green tells them to go except that we all agree that it is so.

But there is an important difference between language and other symbolic systems. In the traffic light system, the connection between the symbol or color and meaning is simple. There are only two parts: the symbol and the meaning. Red simply means stop and green simply means go. Language is a bit more complex in that it is actually composed of three layers: meaning, words (or "wording"), and sounds (or "sounding").

As an example, let us return to the greeting you gave the professor in the hallway earlier in the chapter. You wanted to convey, as briefly as possible, some *meaning* of greeting someone. In order to do this you chose the *wording* "Hi." Note that even such a simple word can be broken down further. It is composed of two distinct sounds: one represented by the "h" and the other by the "i". (This is the level which does not exist for the system of traffic lights). Finally, in *sounding*, you actually utter the word so the professor can hear it.

These three operate as organized layers. In discourse, the sounds we make (i.e., what we pronounce) realizes what we say. What we say, in turn, realizes what we mean, which is part of what we do as a social activity. By contrast, language as system concerns not what we do, but what we "can" do, as shown in the following:

Meaning: what ideas we can express
(encoded in)
Wording: what we can say
(encoded in)
Sounding: what we can pronounce

To introduce some technical vocabulary, linguists call the study of meaning *semantics*, that of wording *grammar* and *lexis* (or *lexicogrammar*), and that of sounding *phonology*. In the case of

writing, no sound is made. Language which does not have sound is called **signing** and the study of signing is called **graphology**.

We will bring this section to a close by presenting the model below, which represents the interaction of all of these concepts, and their relation to each other. This is an important diagram and one which we will return to again later in this book. If we could write a sentence that fully described what is shown below, and what is meant by each part of it, then we might have a pretty good start on a one-sentence definition of language.

Language
(as)

Activity   System
Discourse   meaning
                    wording
   sounding
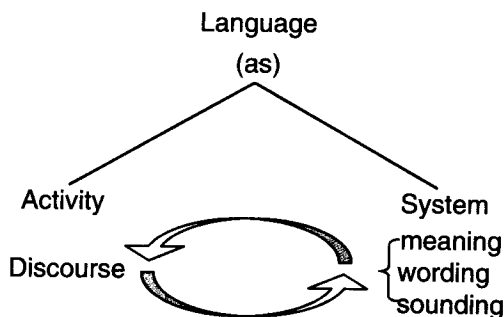
Studying language in terms of psychology

We have mentioned that we see language primarily as a form of social interaction and that this type of linguistics has a close relationship with sociology. But there is another approach to linguistics which takes a distinctly different view. This approach ignores what happens between people but takes exclusive interest in what happens within a single person's mind, in exploring the "grammar rules" that every person is said to know at birth. For this reason, people who take this approach see linguistics as a field which is closely linked not to sociology, but to psychology.

The truth is that although grammar rules have their place, much of what we know about a language is acquired through social

interaction; it is, as stored in our memory, the instances of the social interaction in which we have participated. We may argue that even the command of rules develops through such social interaction. Therefore, we can have another model, which describes our knowledge of language in our brains.
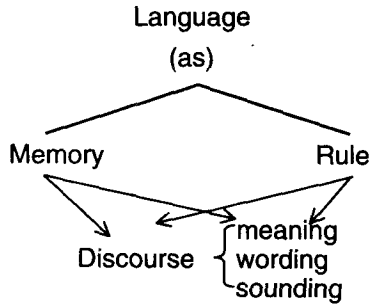
In this model, what is meant by "memory" is straightforward; it refers to all of the experiences you have had in speaking a language that you keep with you in your mind. The word "rule", however, is being used in a way that may be different than you are used to. In linguistics, a rule is a description of how people actually speak, not of how they or others think they ought to speak. (Linguists often explain this by saying that they seek to **describe** language use as it exists, and not to **prescribe** how people ought to use language.) One basic rule of English, for example, is that every sentence must have a complete verb. In English, we must say *He is very tall* even though the equivalent sentence in Chinese would have no verb.

Rules are indeed important. Language as system is governed by rules of the type which were described in the last paragraph. In addition, language as activity is governed by rules of another type, which are sometimes called "conversational rules". When we bump into an acquaintance, we know we must greet him or her by

saying *How are you?* or something equivalent because this is a rule of polite behavior. As we learn a language, we naturally acquire rules of both types, the ones governing language systems and those governing discourse activities.

Following rules, however, is only part of the story. There are many cases in which there is no rule to follow. In these cases, it is our memory which tells us what to do. Many of the most common discourse activities are carried out in this way. The reason that in English we greet people *How are you?* instead of *Where are you going?* is that our memory tells that is the way English-speaking people do it. No more explanation is needed or can be possibly given. Our language contains many such patterns that cannot be easily explained by any rules. Consider the following examples.

A: Did you pass the P. E. exam?
B: Of course.

The expression *of course* can be seen as a prepositional phrase, but its meaning is not a combination of *of* and *course*. We learn this expression simply by memorizing it and memorizing the kind of situation in which we can use it. We do the same thing with such expressions as *on time, from time to time, few and far between,* and all the other idioms that we know. We would not gain anything if we tried to conduct a grammatical analysis of any one of them.

Ask yourself: Do you know any other chunks of language that must be memorized rather than produced by rules? What about *long time no see*? Is this expression grammatically "correct"? Some people say this is a direct translation of a Chinese chunk 好久不见, but why do English-speaking people use it?

We memorize language use in the same way we memorize songs. When you use a phrase such as *by and large*, do you stop to notice that it does not follow the rules of grammar? When you are