



Principles & Practice in Applied Linguistics

应用语言学的原理与实践

Guy Cook

Barbara Seidlhofer

上海外语教育出版社



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**Principles & Practice in
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Guy Cook 编著
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出版前言

本书是一本为献给著名应用语言学家 H·G·威多森而出版的论文集。由 G·库克和 B·赛德豪佛共同编辑。全书共收 24 篇论文,涉及的领域包括:语言教学理论和研究、第二语言习得、口头和书面话语、国际英语、交际能力和语法、体裁和修辞、跨文化交际、语料库语言学、文学和文学教学、课堂实践等。

本书可分为 5 个部分。第一部分直接探讨理论及研究和教学之间的关系,从不同角度对危及灵活性和创造力的因素表示了关注。第二部分讨论第二语言习得,文章就第二语言学习的成功标准是否应为与母语使用者的越相像越好这一富有争论性的问题展开讨论。第三部分涉及话语分析、对比修辞学、间接话语、语篇对形式的影响、话语结构的作用、法律语言学等问题。有的文章论述语料库语言学。第四部分论证语言教学与文学的关系,探讨在外语教学过程中如何利用文学作品去引导学生,使学生后来能逐渐阅读更艰深的作品。另外,文中还提到要消除文学的神秘性,鼓励用非文学方法来指引学生欣赏文学语言。最后部分是有关语言理论在课堂教学中的应用。

全书覆盖面广,信息量大,所载的文章有的论证严密,有的资料丰富,有的见解独到,各具特色,是一本应用语言学方面不可多得的好书。它适用于攻读应用语言学和外语教学理论的硕士生和博士生,对应用语言学研究者和外语教师来说,也是一本有价值的参考书。

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1

An applied linguist in principle and practice

GUY COOK & BARBARA SEIDLHOFER

If we claim that our activities have any professional status, then we have to accept the need for a careful appraisal of the principles upon which they are based. And this must require the exercise of intellectual analysis and critical evaluation not as specialist or élite activities, but ones which are intrinsic to the whole pedagogic enterprise. Naturally, there are risks involved: ideas can be inconsistent or ill-conceived; they may be misunderstood or misapplied; they may induce doubt. Some of us believe that such risks are worth taking.
[WIDDOWSON 1985a]

Enquiry, theory, and practice

IN ANY DISCIPLINE there are easy options. One is separatism. It may be inter-disciplinary separatism which ignores other areas of enquiry, or intra-disciplinary separatism which creates manageable sub-disciplines. In both cases researchers and teachers proclaim themselves unable to comment on a particular problem because it is 'not their area'. A second easy option is to establish, and then kowtow to, an all-encompassing theory, either for the discipline as a whole, or for each sub-discipline within it. Such theories are often associated with an individual name; they make little reference to rivals; and debates with their adherents are terminated not by rational argument, but by quoting from the founder's seminal works. A third safe option (also a kind of separatism) is the divorce of theory from practice. This too is easily

recognized. Theorists are heard to say that—although of course their ideas are significant for practitioners—it is not for them to interfere directly; while practitioners refer disparagingly to theory as something disconnected from their own concerns. Together these three easy options bring stability. The discipline becomes a federation of academic principalities with a common defence policy and tough immigration laws. Its local and central governments are moribund and autocratic. It is a dull place, but a safe one to live and develop a career.

There are powerful human reasons why disciplines tend towards this splendid isolation. Academic enquiry is not only an intellectual matter, but inevitably intertwined with personal careers and lives. Maintaining academic fluidity is at odds with the individual need for stability, especially when the age of academic leadership often coincides not with mercurial youth or wild old age, but with the personal responsibilities of middle age. In the 1990s, moreover, we are living at a time of widespread cuts in education budgets throughout the world, and there is an almost universal pressure on academics to give accounts of themselves in terms of immediate economic return and technological application. This too is an incentive to be content with neat compartments. Life is less stressful when the outsider's question 'What do you do?' and its dreaded sequel 'What use is that?' can both be answered with equanimity. Philistine governments and other purse holders are unlikely to place their confidence in disciplines and individuals that they perceive as always changing identity, always courting change and confusion, always coming up with new theories only immediately to reveal their weaknesses.

Yet certain objects of enquiry—perhaps even all of them—hardly lend themselves to stability and isolationism. Language is the epitome of such an object. It encompasses, of its nature, almost every aspect of human life. It is inextricably linked to our biology and neurology, to our individual personalities and mental states, to our relationships and social structures. Through language we perceive both the internal and external world. Without it, thought, identity, interaction, education, and society could be only rudimentary.

Language

Even if no one knows quite how, language is an outcome of evolution, and our understanding of it, and of appropriate principles for its study,

may be helped by considering it in this perspective. There is a sentimental view of evolution, popular in natural history broadcasting, which presents the current state of nature as perfection. In this view, dubbed 'Panglossia' by the biologist Stephen Gould (1990: 51)¹, modern species and their attributes are viewed as 'improvements' on their ancestors, the culmination of long processes of refinement, neat and efficient in every feature of 'design'. But the outcomes of evolution, including the human ones, are not—as Gould observes—quite like that. They are 'not made by an ideal engineer [but] jury-rigged from a limited set of available components' (Gould 1990: 20). In illustration of this, Gould describes the 'thumb' which allows the herbivorous Giant Panda skilfully to manipulate and strip the leaves from bamboo shoots. From a functional and synchronic viewpoint, this 'thumb' seems to be a perfectly adapted 'design'². Its history and underlying structure, however, turn out to be much messier. It is not a thumb at all, but an evolved outgrowth of bone from the side of the wrist. The real fifth digit, which might have become a thumb, had in the Panda's carnivorous ancestors already become rigid, and is thus redundant, an evolutionary dead end. This is not directed development but an ad hoc adaptation: one of Nature's 'odd arrangements and funny solutions' (ibid.)³.

Language, for all its obvious wonders, is in many ways like the Panda's paw: partly straightforwardly functional, partly dysfunctional, and partly functional in unpredictable ways (Lass 1990). Though efficient for its purposes, it does not have the kind of efficiency which a designer would impose if starting from scratch. The evolution of language has left it with quirks and oddities, while the subsequent branching and splitting of individual languages has also left anomalies, so that the inheritance of every natural language is a hotchpotch of exceptions and contradictions quite alien to the nature of a Newspeak or an Esperanto. Language and languages are, like Pandas, complex adaptive systems. 'They cannot, in general, be successfully analyzed by determining in advance a set of properties or aspects that are studied separately and then combining those partial approaches in an attempt to form a picture of the whole' (Gell-Mann 1992: 14).

Complex systems, whether biological or linguistic, can often seem disordered and anarchic (in a pejorative sense), and there is always a temptation for theorists to neglect the irregular aspects of the system

and to try to reduce everything to a few simple rules. There is plenty of sentimental Panglossia in theories of language, seeking to impose too much elegance and parsimony, as though language were indeed the outcome of rational design⁴. Humans (quite justifiably) are impressed by their own abilities to communicate; for this reason their theories of language reflect their beliefs about what makes a good system. As there is a widespread belief that order, symmetry, and rational design are systemic virtues, so these features appear prominently. Yet on the contrary it may be the very complexity of language—and the degree of disorder and irreducibility which that entails—which makes it so strong and resilient. The very appearance of *disorder* derives from an accumulation of complementary strategies for multiple uses. Workable anarchy often outlives imposed order.

Recognition of complexity implies that many of the current theoretical attempts to impose too much unity and order by seeing language as determined by a few forces cannot *on their own* be a source of principles for its study. Language is viewed in various theories as a genetic inheritance, a mathematical system, a social fact, the expression of individual identity, the expression of cultural identity, the outcome of dialogic interaction, a social semiotic, the intuitions of native speakers, the sum of attested data, a collection of memorized chunks, a rule-governed discrete combinatory system, or electrical activation in a distributed network. But to do justice to language, we do not have to express allegiance to one or some of these competing—and aspiringly hegemonic—views. We do not have to choose. Language can be all of these things at once. Recognition of complexity implies that the object of enquiry is not reducible to description by any one of these theories, but needs to invoke several at once (even contradictory ones). Principles are needed which can accommodate complexity and relate theory to experience (Widdowson 1984a: 7–27; 1990a: 1–6). In this sense the formation of principles may be seen as both deriving from theory but also subjecting theory to assessment and evaluation. Theory becomes the servant and not the master of principle.

Linguistics

Given the all-pervasiveness of language in human life, and its complexity, multiplicity, and internal contradictions, it seems strange at first

glance that the study of language—linguistics—should have sought both to simplify it, and to isolate it from its social and psychological context. From its inception modern linguistics—at least in its most influential branches—has operated by establishing dichotomies and exhorting its practitioners to focus their attention upon one half of them, with the effect of detaching the study of language from neighbouring disciplines. The underlying principles of this detachment derive from de Saussure ([1915] 1974)⁵. The concerns for signifiers not signifieds, for *langue* not *parole*, for synchronic rather than diachronic study serve to divorce language, respectively, from meaning and cognition, from interaction and context, and from both its prehistoric and its historical background (Widdowson 1986a). Language is detached both from people (their thoughts and meanings, relationships and societies) and from peoples (their conflicts, invasions, migrations, and subjugations). In a similar way, the Chomskian dichotomy of competence and performance, seeking to concern linguistics only with the former, isolates the object of study and its acquisition from ‘grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) (Chomsky 1965: 3) deviations from rules (ibid.: 4) semantic reference . . . and situational context (ibid.: 33)’, thus in effect excluding from linguistics the study of pragmatics and discourse. While acknowledging—indeed defining—linguistics as a branch of cognitive psychology, Chomsky (1979: 46) has at the same time sought to keep language separate from other cognitive faculties through the notion that language is modular, both externally, in the sense that it is separate from other mental faculties, and internally, in the sense that it is composed of phonology, syntax, and semantics. (Significantly, as Widdowson observes, the word ‘components’, which implies parts only operational within a whole, has gradually been ousted by the word ‘module’, which suggests insularity, a change which ‘reflects the failure to find coherent relationships between components’ (1990b: 42).) There is some ambivalence among followers of Chomsky as to whether the justification for isolating language as an object of study derives primarily from its ontological nature (i.e. it is actually separate from other mental faculties) or is merely a heuristic (i.e. separation makes it easier to study) or both. But whatever the justification, the modularity of the subject matter, language, goes well with the modularity of the discipline, linguistics

(Widdowson 1990b). It is a metaphor of the separatism, both inter-disciplinary and intra-disciplinary, referred to above. The Saussurean and Chomskian dichotomies define an area of study (one half of each dichotomy) for linguists, and banish the study of the remaining halves elsewhere (Beaugrande 1994).

But the reinstatement of the banished half of a dichotomy need not entail taking vengeance on the favoured half. It would be foolish, if uncomplicated, for applied linguists to disparage the insights of mainstream linguistics, as easily as—for example—some formal linguists dismiss the insights of sociolinguistics⁶. To do so would be to take the easy option of dogmatic theorizing referred to above, dethroning one dynasty, as in *Animal Farm*, to replace it with another. The ontological modularity of language is not without evidence, and cannot be lightly dismissed. It captures an aspect of language. It also makes sense in an account of the human condition and evolution, for the insulation of the language faculty from environmental interference ensures that humans have the capacity to adapt to new contexts but not to be overwhelmed by them (Pinker 1994: 417). But modular or not in its mental representation, language cannot remain disconnected, whether in actual minds (where if it did it would be useless and would presumably never have evolved) or in the theories which seek to understand it. Although there are undoubtedly arguments in favour of isolating language as a temporary heuristic, the objective must be, in each individual mind as in linguistics, to establish the links between the components of language, and then between this composite system and its use, acquisition, and context. This was the maxim of Firth when he talked of the ‘renewal of connection’ (1968: 176–177). There is, though, a danger of simplification here too. The reconnection of the form of language with its context and practical applications is not the same as merely replacing one side of the dichotomy with the other so that language becomes *only* social interaction and *only* practice (with form seen rather vaguely as somehow entirely determined by them and inseparable from them). Where formal linguistics has erred on the side of seeing language as an entirely insular system, divorced from either meaning or use, functional linguistics lives with the danger of the opposite and complementary simplification.