牛津应用语言学丛书

Lexical Phrases and Language Teaching

词汇短语与语言教学

James R. Nattinger
Jeanette S. DeCarrico

北京)

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出 版 前 言

去年5月本社出版了从牛津大学出版社引进的19种“牛津应用语言学丛书”,受到了外语教学界师生的一致好评和欢迎,在短短的一年中,重印了4次。为了向我国的外语教学和研究人员提供更多的学术参考专著,帮助读者了解近年来国外应用语言学和外语教学研究的理论,促进我国外语教学的研究和改革,本社又挑选了10本该系列中的精品,奉献给广大读者。希望本套丛书能够对于借鉴国外研究成果和总结我国自己的外语教学经验,形成具有中国特色的外语教学理论有所帮助。

《词汇短语与语言教学》是一本讨论词组与语言教学之间关系的学术专著。作者Z·R·纳廷革(Zones R. Natinger)教授是美国波特兰州立大学应用语言学系的主任,另一位作者J·S·德卡里科(Jearette S. DeCarrico)也是该系的副教授。

本书以最新的语言习得研究成果为根据,从一个新的角度阐述了语言教学理论与实践,即指导学生在第二语言习得的过程中如同学习母语一样,使用词组或短语(又称“预制的语块”)来学习如何生成、理解、分析新的语言。

全书共分两部分。第一部分对词组与短语(“预制的语块”)作了详细的描述,指出它们在语言中所扮演的角色以及在篇章中的功能。第二部分则具体说明了词组与短语在语言教学中的应用、词组与短语研究的意义及深入研究的方向。

以往的语言教学似乎走了两个极端:结构法过于注重语法规则却忽视了语言在具体语境中的运用;而交际法又恰恰相反,过于注重语言在语境中的运用。本书所提出的“词组法”似乎也可看作带有一点折衷的意味。

总之,这是一本很有新意的、实用性很强的语言教学专著。它适合作为攻读语言学专业或教学法专业的硕士生、博士生的教材或读本,对广大外语教师来说,亦是一本很有价值的参考书。

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2000年5月

To our parents

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Theories of language use

Finding an appropriate theoretical framework of language use, however, presents its own difficulties. Consider performance grammars, for instance. Most theoretical grammars, with their focus on competence, have little that is useful to tell teachers about language performance. In these theories, performance consists mainly of the residue that has not been amenable to linguistic investigation of competence, and thus becomes a category invoked mainly to be dismissed. One must turn to psycholinguistics to find more positively wrought performance grammars. Even here, though, many grammars do not treat performance autonomously, but explore it only as it correlates with competence. For example, these grammars concern very general, abstract rules of psychological processing, based on underlying phonological and syntactic representations of competence, that operate, as competence does, independently of any context. They also describe universals of psychological processing to parallel the search for universals of competence, and thus fail to describe cross-linguistic differences in performance. Both characteristics lessen the relevance of these grammars for teaching. What teachers need are theories of language use that describe how people actually act upon their linguistic knowledge to achieve meaning in context.

One description of language use that has gained considerable influence is that of communicative competence, originally formulated by Hymes (1972), which focuses on rules of appropriate use rather than rules of grammar. However, as Widdowson (1989) observes, there are pitfalls here as well. For just as approaches that rely too heavily on achievement of rules of grammar often lead to dissociation from any consideration of appropriateness, so approaches that rely too heavily on an ability to use language appropriately can lead to a lack of necessary grammatical knowledge and of the ability to compose or decompose sentences with reference to it. There is, he says, 'evidence that excessive zeal for communicative language teaching can lead to just such a state of affairs' (Widdowson 1989: 131). His conclusion then, is that, 'the structural approach accounts for one aspect of competence by concentrating on analysis but does so at the expense of access, whereas the communicative approach concentrates on access to the relative neglect of analysis' (*ibid.*: 132). Given this state of affairs, what is needed, it seems, is an approach that provides some sort of middle ground in that it neglects neither.

Recent studies of language acquisition suggest an answer. For some time, teachers have reviewed language acquisition materials for

ideas about what they might expect of their students in the classroom. The greater part of this research, following prevailing theory, has been designed to test notions of linguistic competence by establishing the extent to which a student's current performance is a correct or incorrect reflection of native-speaker competence. More recently, however, studies in language acquisition have begun to place more emphasis on how language develops for use in social interaction. In paying more attention to *how* rules are learnt, this research examines the path, rather than the goal, of language acquisition (Bickerton 1981). Following that path can be illuminating for language teachers, for along the way we find common patterns among all types of language acquirers. This new direction in language acquisition research offers help for language teachers that competence models alone cannot, we believe; for it not only describes the ways people actually use language, but it also suggests ways that first, second, *and* foreign language learning can be seen, and taught, as similar processes.

One common pattern in language acquisition is that learners pass through a stage in which they use a large number of unanalyzed chunks of language in certain predictable social contexts. They use, in other words, a great deal of 'prefabricated' language. Many early researchers thought these prefabricated chunks were distinct and somewhat peripheral to the main body of language, but more recent research puts this formulaic speech at the very center of language acquisition and sees it as basic to the creative rule-forming processes which follow. For example, first language learners begin with a few basic, unvarying phrases, which they later, on analogy with similar phrases, learn to analyze as smaller, increasingly variable patterns. They then learn to break apart these smaller patterns into individual words and, in so doing, find their own way to the regular rules of syntax.

In this book, we present a language teaching program that draws from this research. Using a unit called the *lexical phrase*, we discuss lessons that lead students to use prefabricated language in much the same way as first language learners do in order to learn how to produce, comprehend, and analyze the new language, and we show how this unit serves as an effective basis for both second language and foreign language teaching. This approach, we believe, avoids the shortcomings of relying too heavily on either theories of linguistic competence on the one hand, or theories of communicative competence on the other. Though the focus is on appropriate language use, the analysis of regular rules of syntax is not neglected.

Preface

For many years, it was commonplace for teachers to turn to linguistic theory for grammars of what to teach in their language classes. But these grammars are not in themselves adequate as the only source of ideas for practical application in the classroom. Conventional grammars fall into three general, somewhat overlapping, categories and present language as either: (1) definitions of terms and lists of structures; (2) social prescriptions about appropriate language form; or (3) descriptions of the abstract language system, which linguists term 'competence', stated in highly general and parsimonious terms. None of these really provides a satisfactory description of language for the classroom. The first two kinds of grammar have already lost much of their formal appeal, for, ever since the waning of audio-lingualism and prescriptivism, teachers no longer feel it effective to teach language as simply an arrangement of 'meaningless' parts, nor do they feel it serves their purpose to teach only to external measures of correctness. The third sort of grammar, though, remains a powerful influence and continues to help shape classroom activity. Many still feel that the focus of language teaching should indeed be this abstract language 'competence', and they look to theoretical grammars of linguistic competence for ideas about what to teach. However, while grammatical rules cannot be ignored, the goal of language teaching is not just to teach abstract rules of competence, but also to get students to utilize these rules in comprehending and producing language successfully in appropriate contexts; and just teaching the underlying system of a language is no guarantee that students will learn to do that. Therefore, teachers need to focus equal attention on theories of language use, on descriptions of language production as well as those of language competence, for more immediately relevant ideas about how best to present language in a classroom. While it is helpful to understand how language structure can be efficiently described, it is equally helpful to understand how language is actually used. Indeed, in recent years many teachers have begun to look more to theories of language use for guidance in the classroom.

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The book is in two parts. Part One is a descriptive account of the lexical phrase and its role in language; Part Two addresses applications for pedagogy. In Part One, the first chapter develops the notion of 'lexical phrase', and examines its nature and role in an overall description of language, in computer analyzed texts and in language acquisition. Chapter 2 examines the structural differences among the various types of lexical phrases, and Chapter 3 describes their essential function in discourse, both spoken and written. Chapter 4 looks in more detail at functions in discourse, focusing especially on the role of lexical phrases in organizing overall patterns of the informational content in discourse. In Part Two, Chapter 5 looks as how phrases can be utilized as practical instruments for language pedagogy, and shows how these phrases can be used to teach conversation in both ESL and in foreign language classrooms. Chapter 6 deals with application of the lexical phrase approach in teaching comprehension, in particular, the comprehension of academic lectures, since current research shows this to be an especially difficult problem for many language learners. Chapter 7 outlines further applications of a lexical phrase approach, specifically to teaching reading and writing, with a focus on the three kinds of written discourse that most students become familiar with. In these chapters of Part Two, we illustrate how a lexical phrase approach offers efficient solutions to difficult pedagogical problems in the language classroom. Finally, Chapter 8 examines areas that seem important ones for further research, and suggests implications of a lexical phrase approach for researching various problems in applied linguistics.

The research on which this book is based includes a broad corpus of spoken discourse collected by the authors (and colleagues) from recorded academic lectures, student/teacher conferences, committee meetings, and a faculty senate meeting. It also includes data from written discourse collected from a variety of textbooks for ESL, textbooks for academic courses, letters to the editor of various news publications, and personal correspondence.

James R. Nattinger
Jeanette S. DeCarrico
Portland, July 1990

PART ONE

Lexical phrases in language description

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