AN INTRODUCTION TO LINGUISTICS FOR STUDENTS OF ENGLISH

英语语言学导论

张克定　编著
夏克志　审订

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前　言

本书是作者受河南省高等教育自学考试指导委员会的委托，为英语专业的考生编写的语言学教材。全书用英语编写，以英语为例，文字浅显易懂。因此，该书不仅适用于自学考试的考生，而且适用于高校英语专业的在校学生、具有同等水平的英语工作者、中学英语教师和英语爱好者。

本书内容较为充实，既包括了语言学基础知识，又反映了语言学理论的新发展。全书可分为两大部分，共计十一章。第一部分讨论了语言研究的主要层次，如音系、形态、句法、语义等；第二部分简明扼要地介绍了自本世纪以来的主要语言学流派，如结构主义语言学、转换生成语言学、系统功能语言学等。各章之间既互相联系又相对独立。每章之后配有供考生思考的练习题。

在编写过程中，作者参考了大量的语言学文献资料及教材（详见书末参考书目），其中引用材料较多的有：Aitchison, Boey, Culler, Elgin, Fromkin and Rodman, Herndon, Jackson, La-Palombara, Leech, Lyons（1981）, Morley, Palmer, Robins, Stork and Widdowson, Wardhaugh（1977），等等。

本书的编写得到了河南大学外语系系主任李泽民先生和秦大维先生的大力支持。在本书初稿完成后，夏克志先生审阅了全部内容，并提出了不少修改意见。在此谨表感谢。

语言学是一门古老而又年轻的科学，内容浩如烟海。由于水平所限，作者虽几经努力，谬误尚在所难免。诚望读者不吝赐教。

编著者

1991 年 6 月于开封

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I

LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

1. Language

Language is of vital importance to us humans. We use language to talk, to write, to read and to think every day. It is LANGUAGE that makes us human and distinguishes us from other animals. We are so familiar with language that we take it rather for granted as we do breathing or walking. Therefore, if asked to explain what language is, few of us could give an adequate answer.

1.1 What is language?

It is not difficult to find definitions of language in the linguistics literature. Below are some of them.

Language is a purely human and noninstinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols. (Sapir)

A language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates. (Bloch & Trager)

Language is essentially a controlled behaviour, shared in various degrees by all the people in a given speech-community. (Crystal)

From now on I will consider a language to be a set (finite or infinite) of sentences, each finite in length and con-

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structed out of a finite set of elements. (Chomsky)

Although these definitions are not exactly the same, each of them stresses some features of language on presupposing some general theory of language and of linguistic analysis. Despite the differences in their views, linguists are in broad agreement about some of the important features of human language, and most of them would accept the view that *language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication.* The definition seems, at first sight, rather imprecise, but each word in it has been carefully chosen to lay emphasis on one aspect of language.

The key term in the definition is *system*. It means that language must be systematic, or else it could not be learned or used consistently. This is because elements in it have to be arranged according to certain rules, and they cannot be combined at will. In the English language, for example, *spl* is a normal consonant cluster as in the word *splash* whereas *lsp* is not acceptable. Likewise,

(1) I am listening to the news over the radio.

is an acceptable sentence, but

(2) I to the listening the am news radio over.

is not.

The *arbitrariness* of language lies in the fact that th no direct connection between the linguistic form and its co sponding linguistic meaning. There is, for instance, no direct connection between the sounds of the word *book* and the concept "book". The fact that different languages have different words for it , *shu* in Chinese, *livre* in French, is a very goo

piece of evidence to confirm the arbitrary nature of language. This, furthermore, explains that language is a *symbolic* system, a system in which words are associated with objects, ideas, and actions by convention. As a result, it is said that *a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.*

Language is *vocal* in that the primary medium of language is sound, and it is sound for all languages, no matter how well developed are their writing systems. Writing systems are nothing but attempts to capture sounds and meanings on paper because writing systems are based on their spoken forms and came into existence much later than the spoken forms.

The term *communication* means that language makes it possible for its users to talk to each other and fulfil their communicative needs. The term *human* in the definition indicates that language is possessed by human beings only and is very different from the communication systems of other living creatures. Just how different language is from systems of nonhuman communication may be a question of some interest to us. This will be made clear in the following section.

1.2 The key properties of human language

Human language is said to have some important properties which no system of animal communication possesses.

1.2.1 Duality

Duality refers to the property of language with two levels of structure, one of sounds and the other of meanings. At one level, the sounds, which are meaningless in isolation, can be

grouped and regrouped into units of meaning. In English, for example, sounds such as *f*, *g*, *d*, *o*, mean nothing separately. They take on meaning only when they are combined together in various ways, as in *fog*, *dog*, *god*. At the other level, these units of meaning can be grouped and regrouped into an infinite number of sentences. Thus, a language has both a phonological system and a grammatical system.

This feature of language makes it possible for its users to have a vast number of combinations of linguistic units at different levels for meaningful messages. The duality feature is only possessed by human language. No system of animal communication possesses duality, or even comes near to possessing it.

1. 2. 2 **Productivity**

The *productivity* of language is the property which enables its users to construct and understand an indefinitely large number of utterances or sentences, incuding the novel utterances that they have never said nor heard before. For example, if, at a party, someone said,

(3) There is a purple platypus crawling across the ceiling.

his friends might think that he was drunk, drugged, or having a nervous breakdown, but they would still understand him. This feature is peculiar to human language, and is in sharp contrast with the unproductive communication systems of animals. A gibbon call system lacks productivity, for gibbons draw all their calls from a fixed repertoire which is rapidly exhausted and

which allows no possibility of novelty. The bee dancing, however, does have a limited productivity. It can be used to communicate about entirely new sources of nectar within a few miles of the hive in any direction, but it conveys no information about anything other than the distance and direction of the nectar sources.

1. 2. 3 **Arbitrariness**

As is said earlier, the *arbitrary* property of language refers to the fact that there is no intrinsic connection between form and meaning, or between the sign and what it stands for. The symbols used are arbitrary. For example, there is no necessary relationshiop between the word *elephant* and the aminal it symbolises. We Chinese refer to the same kind of animal by using *xiang*. However, not every symbol is arbitrary. There are onomatopoeic words in every language, such as *cuckoo*, *bang*, *crash* in English. There exists some connection or non-arbitrary connection between the form and the meaning of such onomatopoeic words because these words are imitations of natural sounds. But the vast majority of the words in a language are non-onomatopoeic: the connection between their form and their meaning is arbitrary. Given the form, it is impossible to predict the meaning and, given the meaning, it is impossible to predict the form.

1. 2. 4 **Interchangeability**

Interchangeability refers to the communication system's ability to be mutually transmitted and received by members of the

same species. For language, any speaker of a language is both a producer and a receiver of messages. Bee dancing and gibbon calls also involve interchangeability, but other animal signals, by contrast, lack this feature. For example, some male birds possess calls which females do not have, and certain fish have similar sex-restricted types of communication. The calls and patterns are not interchangeable between the sexes.

1. 2. 5 **Specialization**

Specialization is a matter of degree or extent to which the use of a signal and the behaviour it evokes are directly linked. In order to determine the extent to which a communicative system is specialized, we compare the trigger consequences and the direct physical consequences of the messages or acts in the system; if they are closely related, then the system is not specialized, but if they have no particular relationship, the system is specialized. Animal communication is said to lack specialization because an animal signal triggers a behaviour. Language, by contrast, is highly specialized, as the behavioural consequences of using a linguistic signal are less predictable and often unpredictable.

1. 2. 6 **Displacement**

This property of language is that language can be used to refer to contexts removed from the immediate situation of the speaker. In other words, language can be used to refer to real or imagined matters in the past, present, or future. For example, if someone says,

(4) I was afraid.

it is not necessary that the speaker is still afraid. However, animal calls seem generally tied to specific situations, such as danger or hunger, and have nothing comparable to displaced speech, for most animals can communicate about things in the immediate environment only. *Displacement*, however, does occasionally occur in the communication of bees. If a worker bee finds a new source of nectar, she returns to the hive and performs a complex dance to inform the other bees of the exact location of the nectar, which may be several miles away. But bees must do this immediately on returning to the hive. They do not dance about the nectar source they discovered on some previous occasion, nor do they speculate about future discoveries. Language can cope with any subject whatsoever, and it does not matter how far away the topic of conversation is in time and space. Language can even be used to talk about language itself.

1.2.7 **Cultural transmission**

Cultural transmission refers to the fact that the ability to speak a language is passed down from one generation to the next by teaching and learning. i. e. the details of the linguistic system must be learned anew by each speaker. They are not biologically transmitted from generation to generation. Animal systems, on the other hand, are genetically transmitted. They are completely determined by the genetic structure of the animal. It is true that the capacity for language in human beings has a genetic basis, too, but the particular language a human

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