

# 英语语言学导论

王会凯 著



科学出版社

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北京

## 内 容 简 介

本书根据作者多年研究英语语言学的积累编写而成。全书共 11 章,分别是 Invitation to Linguistics; Phonetics; Phonology; Morphology; Syntax; Semantics; Pragmatics; Language, Culture and Society; First Language Acquisition; Second Language Acquisition; Linguistics and Foreign Language Teaching and Learning。本书内容紧凑精炼,语言文字简洁易懂,同时配有鲜活生动的语言材料,能进一步帮助读者理解语言学的理论。

本书可以作为普通高等院校英语专业学生的教材,也可以作为中学英语教师的培训材料和英语语言学爱好者的参考读物。

### 图书在版编目(CIP)数据

英语语言学导论/王会凯著. —北京:科学出版社,2014

ISBN 978-7-03-041733-6

I. ①英… II. ①王… III. ①英语-语言学 IV. ①H31

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2014)第 193343 号

责任编辑:任俊红 / 责任校对:胡小洁

责任印制:徐晓晨 / 封面设计:华路天然工作室

科学出版社出版

北京东黄城根北街 16 号

邮政编码:100717

<http://www.sciencep.com>

北京科印技术咨询服务公司 印刷

科学出版社发行 各地新华书店经销

\*

2014 年 8 月第 一 版 开本:720×1000 B5

2014 年 8 月第一次印刷 印张:10

字数:245 000

定价:45.00 元

(如有印装质量问题,我社负责调换)

# 前 言

英语语言学是英语专业学生的一门必修课程，使学生在学习英语语言技能的同时，了解语言本身的内在机制和规律。正是因为语言学描述的是语言的内在机制和规律，使得许多关于语言学的专著和教程呈现出内容枯燥，语言艰涩难懂、过于学术化的特点，例句偏离生活实际，这让初次接触语言学的读者望而生畏。笔者从事英语语言学教学多年，认为语言学的抽象概念完全可以通过简单平实的语言、结合生动语言材料呈现给读者，使抽象的语言学理论变得生动有趣。这也正是编写这本书的初衷。

本书的特点是内容精炼，使用简洁易懂的英语，结合人们日常生活中的鲜活语言材料（包括英语和汉语语料），采用归纳的方法和读者一起探讨、总结语言的规律特点，把抽象难懂的语言理论和概念比较直观而深入浅出的介绍给读者，克服语言学专著中语言理论阐述艰涩难懂的缺点。比如，在介绍语言时，为了使读者理解语言的本质特点，作者有意地拿动物的交流方式来和人类语言进行对比，以生动有趣的方式帮助读者理解语言的本质特征。书中还配有图片来帮助读者更为直观地理解一些抽象的语言学概念。

本书的内容主要分为四个部分。第一部分（第一章）介绍语言学这门学科的研究对象、范围及语言的本质特征和功能。第二部分（第二～七章）详细描述了语言学的内部分支，包括语音学、音系学、形态学、句法学、语义学和语用学，并注意各分支间的衔接和不同。第三部分介绍语言和社会、文化的关系；第四部分（第九～十一章）描述了语言习得的理论及其对语言教学和学习的影响。在介绍语言习得理论时，作者引用日常生活中观察到的中国孩子习得母语的例子和英语学习者的学习经历，来帮助

读者理解语言习得理论及其对英语教学的影响。书内各章内容之间既存在有机联系，又各自独立。

本书以初步涉入语言学领域的语言学习者和爱好者为对象，以简单明了的语言和生动鲜活的语言材料分析为他们开启语言研究的大门，为他们提供进一步钻研语言学的必备知识。

本书在编写过程中得到科学出版社和一些同行专家的支持，在此表示感谢。

由于编者水平有限，书中难免有疏漏和不足之处，欢迎读者和同行指正。

王会凯

华北水利水电大学

2014年5月



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# Chapter 1 Invitation to Linguistics

This chapter is a general introduction to linguistics, covering some basic concepts related to linguistics and language, the subject of linguistics. The first section is devoted to linguistics, dealing with the definition of linguistics, the basic distinctions in linguistics and the scope of linguistics; the second section is devoted to language, dealing with the definition of language, design features of language and functions of language.

## 1.1 Linguistics

### 1.1.1 What is Linguistics

What is Linguistics? Linguistics is defined as the scientific study of language. The definition seems very simple, but to get a full understanding of the subject, a detailed explanation is necessary. Linguistics is the study of language, but “study” is different from the “study” in “to study English” which means “to learn”; here “study” means “research”. Linguists conduct researches into the origin, growth, organization, nature and development of language, and discover the general rules and principles governing language and language use.

Language is the research subject of linguistics. In the definition of linguistics, the word “language” is in singular form without any articles

preceding it. This implies that the word “language” used in this definition does not refer to any specific language such as English or Chinese, although linguists do conduct researches into these languages; “language” refers to human language in general.

“scientific” means the scientific ways which are employed to conduct researches into language so that any theory about language is objective and reliable. The process of language research will well illustrate the word “scientific”.

To begin a scientific study of language, the first step is to observe linguistic facts. For instance, a newly occurred Chinese sentence construction “我有吃过饭” is frequently used by young people on many occasions, even in Television programs.

The second step is to make a generalization about the observed linguistic facts. In the case of “我有去过那儿”, the researchers need to describe who tend to use this construction and in what contexts it is usually used.

The third step is to formulate a hypothesis to account for the generalized linguistic facts. In this case, the researcher may hypothesize that the occurrence of this Chinese sentence structure is due to the influence of the English sentence structure “I have been there.”

After that, the formulated hypothesis will be repeatedly tested by more linguistic facts. If the hypothesis stands the test, a linguistic theory is constructed; if not, the hypothesis has to be improved in order to account for more linguistic facts.

Only by following these steps, can the study of language be “scientific”.

### 1. 1. 2 The Scope of Linguistics

As we have known, linguistics studies human language. Then what



aspects of language are covered? Since language is related to the society and the human being in many aspects, will all these aspects be covered by linguistics? The following two sections will answer these questions.

### 1. Intra-disciplinary Branches (Micro-linguistics)

Linguistics is the scientific study of language. To be specific, it is a scientific and thorough study of language system. Language system consists of three sub-systems, the sound system, structure system and meaning system. Based on the study of these three systems, linguistics is divided into six subbranches: Phonetics, Phonology, Morphology, Syntax, Semantics and Pragmatics, as shown in Fig.1.1.

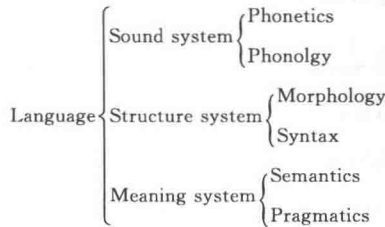


Fig.1.1 Subbranches of Linguistics

While both Phonetics and Phonology study the sound of language, they are different. Phonetics studies the production of each speech sound, such as how the sound is produced, transmitted and received; in another word, it studies the physical properties of sounds. Phonology studies the sound system, how sounds are put together and used to form meaningful units in communication.

Morphology studies the structure (internal organization) of words, how smaller components are arranged to form words. Syntax studies the structure of sentences, how words are arranged together to form permissible sentences.

Both Semantics and Pragmatics study language meaning. However,

Semantics studies the literal or conventional meaning of language—the meaning of words and sentences which are put in isolation, for example, the literal meaning of the sentence *The phone is ringing*. On the contrary, Pragmatics studies the meaning of language in context, the situational meaning or intentional meaning—what the speakers really mean by their utterances, for instance, the contextual meaning of the utterance “the phone is ringing” when it is uttered by a specific person in a specific situation.

This division of linguistics is based on the subsystems of language, the subject of linguistics; therefore these subbranches of linguistics are called intra-disciplinary branches, also called micro-linguistics.

## 2. Inter-disciplinary Branches (Macro-linguistics)

Language is also closely interwoven with many aspects of society and human beings. It has often been studied in relation with other disciplines such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, etc. The studies of language in relation to other disciplines are the interdisciplinary branches of linguistics. They are also called macro-linguistics, such as sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, computational linguistics, applied linguistics, etc.

Sociolinguistics studies language in relation to society, how social factors such as region, social status and gender influence the using of language. It studies such matters as the linguistic identity of social groups, social attitudes to language, standard and non-standard language, and so on. We will return to sociolinguistics in Chapter 8.

Psycholinguistics studies the relation between language and mind, how our mind works when we use language. It deals with the mental processes that are involved in language acquisition, language production and language comprehension.

Computational Linguistics is an approach to linguistics which employs

mathematical techniques, often with the help of computers, in language research. One is called Corpus Linguistics which objectively describes language use based on the extensive accumulation of naturally occurring language data with the help of computer in its analysis.

Applied Linguistics is concerned with applying linguistic theories and descriptions to other fields, especially to foreign language learning and teaching. Chapter 11 will show how some linguistic theories facilitate language teaching and learning in formal education.

### 1. 1. 3 Important Distinctions in Linguistics

Linguistics is a study of language, but what kind language should be studied, the abstract language system or concrete language data? How is it studied, describing the actual language use or prescribing some rules for the speakers to follow? Should we study language at a point of time or through its history? Based on these questions, linguists have proposed several pairs of important distinctions in linguistics.

#### 1. Langue VS Parole

Regarding what kind of language should be studied in linguistics, the Swiss linguist F. De Saussure proposes the distinction between langue and parole. Langue refers to the abstract linguistic system shared by all the members of a speech community; it's a set of conventions and rules that all the language users in the same speech community have to abide by; it is not actually uttered and relatively stable. For example, all the Chinese people have to use the same character “笔” when referring to the kind of stationary which is used to write with wherever he or she comes from. This Chinese character “笔” is one example of langue.

Parole refers to the realization of langue in actual use; it's the concrete use of the conventions and rules by people in particular situations, so it's always changing, varying from person to person, from situation to situation. For instance, the Chinese character, langue “笔” is pronounced quite differently by different people in different situations, varying from the standard pronunciation *bǐ* to less standard *bí* or *beǐ*. Despite the variations in its pronunciation, all Chinese people use the same character “笔” to refer to the same thing.

Saussure thinks that parole is too varied and confusing to conduct a systematic investigation, so modern linguistics should study langue, the abstract linguistic system of language.

## 2. Competence VS Performance

This distinction between competence and performance proposed by the American linguist Norm Chomsky also concerns the question what aspects of language is supposed to be studied in linguistics.

Chomsky defines competence as an ideal speaker's knowledge of the rules of his or her language; it is a set of internalized abstract rules stored in an ideal speaker's mind, which are not actually uttered but enable a speaker to utter and understand an indefinite number of sentences and recognize mistakes. Just like langue, it is relatively stable. For instance, a speaker's knowledge about the agreement between the third person singular subject and the verb behind it in simple present tense is his or her competence in English, for example, *He works everyday*.

Performance is a speaker's actual use of language in concrete situations, or the realization of the speaker's knowledge of his language. It is easily influenced by psychological and social factors. Even if the speaker knows the agreement between the third person singular subject and the verb behind it in simple present

tense, he or she may utter *He work everyday* instead of *He works everyday*. His utterance *He work everyday* is his performance. Therefore, one's performance does not always match his competence.

As it is with Saussure, Chomsky also thinks that linguistics should study a speaker's competence rather than his or her performance because the performance is too haphazard to be studied systematically.

Chomsky's distinction between competence and performance is very similar to Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*. They both define competence and *langue* as an abstract system of rules of language, performance and *parole* as the respective realization of competence and *langue*.

Similarity:            competence / *langue*(abstract)  
                                 performance / *parole*(concrete)

However, they are quite different in defining the abstract language rules; Saussure takes a sociological point of view, defining *langue* as a set of social convention all the speakers in the same speech community must abide by; while Chomsky takes a psychological point of view, considering competence as a property of the mind of each individual speaker, so each speaker's competence is slightly different from another person's.

### 3. Descriptive VS Prescriptive

Based on the approach taken in linguistic study, the distinction between descriptive and prescriptive is proposed. Descriptive study describes and analyzes the language people actually use, dealing with language facts. It concerns *People do/don't say X*.

Prescriptive study aims to lay down rules for "correct" use of language, dealing with the "standard" of language using. It concerns *Do/Don't say X*. The traditional grammar is prescriptive, for it tells people how to use



language correctly, such as “do not end sentences with a preposition”. However, people do end sentences with a preposition in their daily use of language, such as “He is the boy I used to play with”.

Modern linguistics is mostly descriptive. It does not prescribe rules for language users to follow; instead, it observes and describes how people actual use language in their daily communication.

#### 4. Synchronic VS Diachronic

As an answer to the question should we study language at a point of time or through its history, the distinction between synchronic and diachronic is proposed. Synchronic study is the description of a language at some point in time, such as *A grammar for modern Greek*, *the structure of Shakespeare's English*, *the study of Chinese in Qing Dynasty*, etc.

Diachronic study is the study of language as it changes through time; it's a historical study. For instance, *A study on the development of Indo-European language* and *the study of Chinese from Tang Dynasty to Qing Dynasty* are both diachronic study.

However, sometimes it's difficult to draw a sharp line between synchronic and diachronic study. For example, is *The Study of Chinese from 1900 to 1950* a synchronic or diachronic study? Due to the vast amount of energy and time put into a diachronic study, synchronic study is preferred in modern linguistics.

## 1.2 Language

We use language everyday to communicate with people, but what is language? You may define it as “language is a means of communication”. This is true with the primary function of language, but can animals' means