



Language is not an abstract construction of the learned, or of dictionary makers, but is something arising out of the work, needs, ties, joys, affections, tastes of long generations of humanity, and has its bases, broad and low, close to the ground.

An Introduction to Linguistics

# 语言学导论

杨潮光 / 编著



对外经济贸易大学出版社  
University of International Business and Economics Press

**图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据**

语言学导论: 英文/杨潮光编著. —北京: 对外经济贸易大学出版社, 2007

ISBN 978-7-81078-961-5

I. 语… II. 杨… III. 语言学-英文 IV. H0

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2007) 第 144685 号

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### An Introduction to Linguistics

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责任编辑: 章 霞

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对外经济贸易大学出版社

北京市朝阳区惠新东街 10 号 邮政编码: 100029

邮购电话: 010-64492338 发行部电话: 010-64492342

网址: <http://www.uibep.com> E-mail: [uibep@126.com](mailto:uibep@126.com)

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北京市山华苑印刷有限责任公司印装 新华书店北京发行所发行

成品尺寸: 140mm × 203mm 10.125 印张 254 千字

2007 年 10 月北京第 1 版 2007 年 10 月第 1 次印刷

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ISBN 978-7-81078-961-5

印数: 0 001 - 5 000 册 定价: 17.00 元

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——Walt Whitman

Language comes to life only when it is put to use.  
It is functional by nature, in origin and orientation.

——MAK Halliday (1964)

# 前 言

本书采用功能派语言学的观点编写，与迄今为止国内已出版的各类语言学导论教材相比，具有如下鲜明特点：

一、本书着重从语言的社会功能出发，书中的第一部分在揭示了语言性质和功能之后，首先讨论语义学的基本内容，即人们是如何通过语言来交流信息，表达思想的；然后讨论词法学、词汇学及句法学，即如何用词汇和句子来表达不同的语义；最后讨论语音学和音位学，即如何利用言语的语音和音位系统来传递语义。

二、本书的第二部分揭示了语言与思维、现实，语言与文化、社会、个人的密切关系，意在引导学员宏观地认识语言，深入地理解语言学的理论价值和实用价值。

三、本书的最后几章探讨语言与商业、语言与政治的密切关系，并讨论语言学对外语“教”与“学”的启迪，重点介绍功能派语言教学的一些观点。

四、本书力求深入浅出，在介绍相关理论的同时，使用大量生动典型的语言实例，以期达到学术性和实用性的完美结合。本书还为各章节配有复习题和笔头作业题，并列出了所推荐的参考书目。

本书既可作为英语专业本科高年级学生的教材，英语专业一年级硕士研究生语言学课程的参考教材，也可作为各类人员的自学用书。

本书是编者从事语言学教学二十七年来经验总结。这种在语言各层次的教学，从语义系统出发，再进入词汇语法系统，

然后步入语音系统的教学法，曾受到已故著名英语教育专家许国璋教授的高度评价。在多年来的教学实践中，这一教法屡获学员们的欢迎，他们以极大的兴趣投入学习，不再感到语言学深奥难懂，枯燥乏味，并深刻体认到语言学的奠基作用和应用价值。

“把语言学变成人人爱学的课程”，这是本书编者的宿愿。书中如有不当之处，恳请各方读者不吝赐教。

杨潮光

对外经济贸易大学

2007年5月24日

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Part 1

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## **Chapter 1**

# ***Language and Linguistics***

Any study of language usually begins with a question of the nature and function of human language. Chapter 1 discusses the following questions: What is language? What is it that makes human language different from animal communication systems? How can we define human language? What is the function of language? What does the linguist do? Then some basic concepts in linguistics are introduced.

## **1.1 Nature and Properties of Human Language**

As language majors, we should first of all understand what it is that we are studying. Without a good understanding of the nature and properties of language we are learning, it is impossible for us to have a correct and proper approach to the task of learning. So let's begin with this question.

### *1.1.1 What is language?*

This is a question very hard to answer although we possess

language and use it every minute of our life in listening, speaking, reading or writing. When we are asked the question, we find we do not have a ready answer. Is it a kind of knowledge we have in our mind like history and geography, or is it a sort of behaviour we perform, like acting on the stage? Or, a habit or a skill we have learnt, like walking and swimming? Or, a thing like a tool, or an event we come across very often, like a talk or an oral interview? Language in fact is such a complex phenomenon that no one viewpoint can see it as a whole. The question is not which answer is right, but which is useful to a particular purpose. To us language teachers and learners, the following eight defining properties are important.

#### A. Language is symbolic.

Language is a system of signs, designed for communication. A sign becomes a symbol when the sign and the object it signifies are associated by social convention, like a 'wedding ring' as a symbol of marriage, and 'red star' as symbol of the Chinese People's Liberation Army. Language is thus one of the semiotic systems, and meaning is given to speech sounds, words and sentences by convention. While languages like English use alphabetic letters and are good for logical thinking, Chinese adopts characters that are designed to represent objects and are good for embodying the reality in speakers' mind. However, language is not just a simple collection of symbols, like the Morse code or telegraphic code in which there is one-to-one relationship between the sign and the object it signifies. It is much more complicated and more variable and versatile.

B. Language is both arbitrary and conventional.

Language is created at the will of human beings. It is the greatest creation of our human brains. The relationship between speech sounds and the meanings they represent in the languages of the world is, for the most part, arbitrary. That is, there is no natural, direct or one-to-one fixed connection between the sign and its meaning, between the word and its object, and between the grammar and the meaning it carries. So far no computer can rival it. But once it is created, the user can not change it at will. It has to become conventional, to be shared and accepted and followed by its users, including us foreign language learners. We have to follow the proverb, "While in Rome, do as the Romans do."

C. Language is systematic.

Language is systematic. It is patterned in systems of two dimensions: horizontally in chains or syntagmatically in sequence or word order, and vertically for choice or paradigmatically mutually substitutable. And language is organized in three systems known as tristratal systems: meaning system; wording system and sounding system, with meaning system as the center. What we must bear in mind at all times is that languages differ from each other in their systems in different degrees, semantically, morpho-syntactically, phonologically and graphologically. All this makes it difficult for us foreign language learners to transfer from one language system to another. For instance,

*Difference in morphology*

Finnish nouns have much more inflectional morphemes than English nouns in case system.

mantere      nominative, singular

manterean	genitive ( possessive ), singular	mantereiden	genitive, plural
manteretta	partitive, singular	mantereita	partitive, plural
mantereeseen	illative ( deductive ) singular	mantereisiin	illative, plural
mantereena	essive ( existential ), singular, etc.		

### *Difference in lexicon*

Chinese	English	French	German	Russian	Spanish
房子	house	maison	Haus	dom	casa
手	hand	main	Hand	ruka	mano
树	tree	arbre	Baum	derevo	arbol

### *Difference in syntax*

a. English	<i>Maxim defends Victor.</i>	S + V + O
Russian	<i>Maksim zasciscajet Viktora.</i>	S + V + O
	<i>Maksim Viktora zasciscajet</i>	S + O + V
	<i>Viktora Maksim zasciscajet</i>	O + S + V
	<i>Viktora zasciscajet Maksim</i>	O + V + S

In Russian, all these sentences are accepted as having the same meaning.

- b. In English all nouns can be the subject of a sentence, as in  
*This hotel forbids dogs.*

But in German, 'location' nouns can not be the subject, so the above English sentence should be rewritten in German as

*In diesem Hotel sind Hunde verboten.* ( not as *Dieses Hotel verbietet Hunde* )

- c. In Finnish, the noun has to change its form to accord with its



thematic role in the sentence ,

as koulu ( school )	when used as the root
koulusta ( from the school )	when used as the source
kouluun ( to the school )	when used to show direction

- d. Double negatives are regular in many languages, as in  
 French *Je ne veux parler avec personne.* ( I not want speak with no-one. )  
 Italian *Non voglio parlare con nessuno.* ( Not I-want speak with no-one. ).

#### D. Language is human specific.

Language is human specific, unique to human beings, that is, a special human phenomenon. Man talks. So far as we understand, the possession and acquisition of language makes man different from all other creatures on earth. Therefore, language is seen as a sort of human essence. Just as Bertrand Russell says, “No matter how eloquently a dog may bark, he cannot tell you that his parents were poor but honest.”

- a. “Human beings are equipped with special brain mechanism to acquire language by birth. Human beings have developed a special brain mechanism to learn and acquire language. Human beings are ‘wired up’ for language, with genetically programmed language acquisition devices — the brain and speech organs” (Chomsky’s Innate Theory).

Some scholars have gone so far to suggest that the human infant is born with a specific, genetically-determined