



普通高等教育“十二五”规划教材

英语语言学

概论

AN INTRODUCTION TO
ENGLISH LINGUISTICS

侯 敞/编著

中国石化出版社

[HTTP://WWW.SINOPEC-PRESS.COM](http://www.sinopec-press.com)

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邮编:100011 电话:(010)84271850

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<http://www.sinopec-press.com>

E-mail:press@sinopec.com.cn

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前 言

《英语语言学概论》简要地介绍了英语语言学基础知识，是了解英语语言学基本理论和概念的入门书籍，可作为英语专业英语语言学课程的教材或教学参考书，还可用作英语专业准备考研的复习材料。

语言学领域广泛，派别林立，术语繁多，恰当的取舍是编好语言学概论的前提。本书以介绍英语语言学基本理论和方法为主要目的，在内容上既满足理工科类院校英语专业教学的需要，又考虑综合类院校英语专业教学的需要，还兼顾师范类院校英语专业教学的需要，并力图突出简洁、明了、实用的特点。全书共十章，可分为三部分。第一章为第一部分，主要介绍了语言的本质和语言学的研究内容；第二章至第六章为第二部分，主要对语言的各个层面进行了阐述，如语音、词汇、句法、语义和语用学；第七章至第十章为第三部分，主要介绍了语言与外部要素的联系，如语言与社会、语言与文化及变化、语言与心理及思维、语言习得与语言学理论在语言教学中的应用问题等。本书设有三个附录。附录1介绍了几位著名语言学家及其理论。附录2为相关练习题和答案。附录3为语言学英汉对照术语表，可供阅读本书及有关资料参考使用。

为了方便读者学习和掌握章节的重点，编者在每一章后设有相应的练习题。为了方便有志攻读英语专业硕士生复习备考语言学考试内容，编者参考了几十所重点高校英语语言文学专业硕士研究生入学考试中语言学试卷，并按其试题五种主要题型：选择题、填空题、正误判断题、名词解释和问答题编制每章后的练习题。编者还编制了两套测试卷，其中的大部分试题涉及本书的主要内容，用来测试读者对语言学的基本理论和概念掌握的情况。

在编写该书的过程中，编者参考了国内外许多相关著作与期刊，在此向各位作者及编辑表示最诚挚的感谢。编者还曾就有关问题多次向国内外专家求教，特此一并表示衷心的感谢。由于编者水平有限，不当之处在所难免，敬请专家学者及广大读者批评指正。

编 著 者

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 What is language?

We all speak and use language. Language is so indispensable to us that we all tend to take it for granted. It is language that makes us human. It is its distinctive characteristic that separates the human from other species. Language enables us to understand ourselves for the study of language is in large part the study of man. Then “What is language?” This may sound like a simple question. But actually it is very difficult to give a satisfactory answer. Linguists have been trying to define the nature of language. Following are some of them.

“Language is a purely human and non instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols.” (Sapir 1921)

“From now on I will consider language to be a set of sentences, each finite in length and constructed out of a finite set of elements.” (Chomsky 1957)

Language is “the institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral-auditory arbitrary symbols”. (Hall 1968)

Despite the differences and limitations in their definitions, there are some important characteristics of human language that linguists share. They are included in the following generally accepted definition:

Language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication.

This definition has captured the main features of language. Firstly, language is systematic for language is rule-governed and elements of language are combined according to certain rules. They cannot be arranged at will. For instance, “bkli” is not a possible sound combination in English, and “He the table cleaned.” is not an acceptable English sentence.

Secondly, language is arbitrary in the sense that there is no intrinsic (logic) connection between a linguistic form and its meaning. For instance, the word “knife” has no logic connection with the instrument we use to cut things with. The fact that different languages have different words for the same object is a good illustration of the arbitrary nature of language. This also explains the symbolic and conventional nature of language: words are just symbols associated with objects, actions, ideas, etc. by convention. The symbolic and conventional nature of language is well illustrated by a famous quotation from Shakespeare’s play “Romeo and Juliet”: “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”

Thirdly, language is vocal because the primary medium for all languages is sound, no matter how well developed their writing systems are. All evidence points to the fact that writing systems came into being much later than the spoken forms and they are only attempts to capture sounds and

meaning on paper. We recognize that people with little or no literacy can also be competent language users.

Finally, language is human in the sense that language is human-specific, i. e. , it is very different from any animal communication system, such as bird songs and bee dances. There are certain characteristics of human language that are not found in the communication systems of any other species. Although most animals are assumed to communicate in some way, they convey limited information and only express emotions such as fear and warnings.

1.2 Design features of language

Design features refer to the defining properties of human language that distinguish it from any animal system of communication. By comparing human language with animal communication systems, we can have a better understanding of the nature of language.

In his book *A Course in Modern Linguistics* (1958), the American linguist Charles Hockett specified twelve design features, five of which are frequently discussed: arbitrariness, productivity, duality, displacement and cultural transmission.

1.2.1 Arbitrariness

By arbitrariness we mean that there is no logical connection between meaning and sounds or forms, in other words the sound or form has no natural relationship with the object it is used to indicate in the world. We cannot explain why a bed is called a /bed/ and a pen a /pen/. We cannot infer the meaning of a word from its sound because the same sound may have different meaning, as in *hear* and *here*. Similarly, we cannot infer the sound from the meaning of a word because the same meaning may use a different sound to indicate it, as in *fall* and *autumn*. A good example is the fact that different languages may use different sounds to indicate the same object.

On the other hand, for animal signals, there appears to be obvious connection between the conveyed message and the signal used to convey it. For example, a bee dance is iconic rather than arbitrary; that is it rather directly represents its subject matter, because a direct connection exists between the dance itself and the source of nectar in the number and direction of the gyrations.

However, language is not entirely arbitrary. There are some words that have a direct relation or correspondence between sound and meaning, such as onomatopoeia (cuckoo, crash, and bang). Besides, some compound words are not entirely arbitrary, either. For instance, “photo” and “copy” are both arbitrary, but the compound word “photocopy” is not entirely arbitrary. However, there are few non-arbitrary words in the vocabulary in a language.

What then is the link between a linguistic sign and its meaning? It is a matter of convention. Conventionality means that in any language there are certain sequences of sounds that have a conventionally accepted meaning. Those words are customarily used by all speakers with the same intended meaning and understood by all listeners in the same way. Though language is arbitrary, it does not mean that an individual can use any linguistic sign to represent any meaning at will. He has to follow

the convention established in his speech community; otherwise, he cannot communicate with other members of the speech community.

1. 2. 2 Duality

Language is a system, which consists of two sets, or two levels, of structures, one being lower and the other higher. The lower or the basic level is sounds which are basically meaningless, but can be grouped and regrouped into a higher level of larger units such as morphemes and words which are meaningful. This nature is called duality or double articulation. For instance, the grouping of the three sounds /l/, /u:/, and /p/ can mean either loop or pool, the former a shape like a curve or a circle and the latter a small pond. Then the meaningful units at the higher level can be arranged and rearranged into an infinite number of sentences. The property of duality then only exists in such a system. This unique feature of language enables its users to talk about any thing within their knowledge. Many animals communicate with special calls like woof, meow etc. have corresponding meanings, but these units cannot be further divided into discrete sounds or further combined to make larger units such as sentences. So we say animal communication systems do not have this design feature of human language — the property of duality. Consequently, the communicative power of animal language is highly limited.

This duality of levels is, in fact, one of the most economical features of human language, since with a limited set of distinct sounds we are capable of producing a very large number of sound combinations (e. g. words) which are distinct in meaning and which are capable of producing an infinite number of sentences.

1. 2. 3 Productivity

Productivity or creativity refers to the ability to construct and understand an infinitely large number of sentences by its users, including those they have never heard before, in other words language is creative in that it makes possible the construction and interpretation of new signals by its users.

The productivity of language partly originates from its duality which we just discussed in the above section, namely, because of duality the speaker is able to combine the basic linguistic units to form an infinite set of sentences, most of which are never before produced or heard. If someone says “Green dreams are sleeping furiously”, none of the native speakers who have heard it would have any difficulty understanding it, though it is unlikely that they could have heard it before.

That language is productive or creative is also due to its recursiveness which provides a theoretical basis for its users to create endless sentences. For instance, we can write a sentence like the following and go on endlessly; He bought a book which was written by a teacher who taught in a school which was known for its graduates who. . .

Productivity is unique to human language. Most animal communication systems appear to be highly restricted in terms of the number of different signals that their users can send and receive. For instance, gibbon calls are not productive; the source is rapidly exhausted, it is impossible to create.

Bee dancing is used to indicate food resources, and it is the only kind of message that can be sent through the dancing.

1.2.4 Displacement

Displacement refers to the fact that human languages enable their users to talk about things which are not present (in time and space) at the moment of communication. In other words, we can refer to real and unreal things, things of the past, of the present, and of the future, and things in remote areas. For instance, we can refer to George Washington (the first American president), or the North Pole, even though the former has been dead for over 200 years and the latter is situated far away from us. We can also refer to mythical creatures, fairies, angels and some recently invented characters such as Superman.

The feature of displacement indicates that human beings have the power to handle generalizations and abstractions. We can create fictions and describe abstract concepts such as truth and beauty.

In contrast, animal communication systems possess no such feature. Animal calls are mainly uttered in response to immediate changes of situation, that is, in contact of food, in presence of danger, or in pain. Once the danger or pain is gone, they will stop calling.

1.2.5 Cultural transmission

We are all born with the ability to acquire language, but the details of any particular language a person learns to speak is not genetically transmitted. In other words, though the capacity of language in human beings has a genetic basis, the details of any language system are not acquired inherently. Instead they have to be taught and learned. An English speaker and a Chinese speaker are both able to use a language, but they are not mutually intelligible. An infant born of Chinese parents but brought up in an English-speaking community will acquire English as a native language. These examples show that any specific language, such as English, Chinese and Japanese, is not acquired by inheritance, but culturally transmitted. We acquire a specific language in a culture with other speakers and not from parental genes. The process whereby language is passed on from one generation to the next is described as cultural transmission.

In contrast, animal call systems are genetically transmitted. They are born with the ability to produce a set of calls peculiar to their species. And they pass on this capacity from one generation to the next by instinct rather than by teaching or learning.

1.3 Functions of language

Language functions in our society as a principal means of communication. It also functions as social control. It is not only a psychological phenomenon, but also a social fact. Our speech has a variety of functions in addition to communicating facts; we may speak to convey information, to express our emotions, to reveal feelings, to strengthen a relationship with somebody, etc. Linguists

have classified the functions of language in different terms and different categories. Jakobson (1960), a famous Prague school structuralist, established a well-known framework of language functions, namely: referential (to convey message and information), poetic (to indulge in language for its own sake), emotive (to express attitudes, feelings and emotions), cognitive (to persuade and influence others through commands and entreaties), phatic (to establish communion with others) and metalingual function (to clear up intentions, words and meanings). Halliday (1994) proposes a theory of metafunctions of language, that is, language has ideational function (constructs a model of experience and constructs logical relations), interpersonal function (enacts social relationships) and textual function (creates relevance to context). Hu Zhuanglin (2006) lists seven categories: informative function (language is used to tell something, to give information or to reason things out), interpersonal function (language is used to establish and maintain people's social status), performative (language is used to change the social status of persons) emotive function (language is used to create certain feelings in the hearer), phatic communion (language is used for establishing an atmosphere or maintaining social contact), recreational function (language is used to amuse), and metalingual function (language is used to talk about language itself). In the following we will introduce some of the major categories of language function.

1.3.1 Phatic function

The “phatic function” refers to language being used for setting up a certain atmosphere or maintaining social contacts (rather than for exchanging information or ideas). Greetings, farewells, and comments on the weather in English and on clothing in Chinese all serve this function. Much of the phatic language (e. g. “How are you?” “Fine, thanks.”) is insincere if taken literally, but it is important. If you don't say “Hello” to a friend you meet, or if you don't answer his “Hi”, you ruin your friendship.

1.3.2 Directive function

The “directive function” means that language may be used to get the hearer to do something. Most imperative sentences perform this function. For example, “Tell me the result when you finish.” or “Come here!”

1.3.3 Informative function

Language serves an “informational function” when used to tell something, to give information or to reason things out. This function is characterized by the use of declarative sentences. For example, “Water boils at 100 degrees Centigrade.” or “One Way Only” .

1.3.4 Interrogative function

When language is used to obtain information, it serves an “interrogative function”. This includes all questions that expect replies. For example, “What time is it now?” “What's your age?” and “How do you know?” However, rhetorical questions make an exception, since they demand no

answer, at least not the reader's/listener's answer. For example, "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"

1.3.5 Expressive function

The "expressive function" is the use of language to reveal something about the feelings or attitudes of the speaker. Subconscious emotional ejaculations are good examples, like "Good heavens!" "My God!" Sentences like "I'm sorry about the delay." can serve as good examples too, though in a subtle way.

1.3.6 Evocative function

The "evocative function" is the use of language to create certain feelings in the hearer. Its aim is, for example, to amuse, startle, antagonize, soothe, worry or please. Jokes (not practical jokes, though) are supposed to amuse or entertain the listener; advertising to urge customers to purchase certain commodities; propaganda to influence public opinion. Obviously, the expressive and the evocative functions often go together, i. e. , you may express, for example, your personal feelings about a political issue but end up by evoking the same feeling in, or imposing it on, your listener. That's also the case with the other way round.

1.3.7 Performative function

Performative function means people speak to "do things" or perform actions. On certain occasions the utterance itself as an action is more important than what words or sounds constitute the uttered sentence. The judge's imprisonment sentence, the president's war or independence declaration, etc. , are examples of performative function. At a meeting, for example, as soon as the chairman says "I declare the meeting open!" the meeting has started.

1.4 What is linguistics?

Linguistics is generally defined as a scientific study of language. It is a major branch of social science. It mainly tries to answer the basic questions "What is language?" and "How does language work?" Linguistics studies not just one language of any society, but the languages of all human society, language in general.

A scientific study is one which is based on the systematic investigation of data, conducted with reference to some general theory of language structure. Following is the brief process of linguistic study:

observation—generalization—hypothesis—tested by further observation—theory

First, linguists have to observe certain language facts, and make generalizations about them; then basing on these generalizations, they formulate some hypotheses to account for the facts; and then the hypotheses are tested by further observations; and finally they construct a linguistic theory about what language is and how it works.

1.5 Main branches (scope) of linguistics

It is generally agreed that linguistics should include at least such parameters as phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. The following are these main branches of linguistics.

1.5.1 Phonetics

The study of human speech sounds is called phonetics. It aims to provide the set of features or properties that can be used to describe and distinguish all the sounds in human language. Phonetics is mainly divided into three sub-branches, namely, articulatory phonetics, acoustic phonetics and auditory phonetics. The focus of the book will be articulatory phonetics.

1.5.2 Phonology

The study of sound patterning is called phonology. It studies the rules governing the structure, distribution, and sequencing of speech sounds and the shape of syllables. It reveals how sounds are combined in a language and explains why certain words take the form they do.

1.5.3 Morphology

The study of the internal structure of words is called morphology. The sounds used in linguistic communication are presented by symbols, i. e. morphemes which are the minimal units of meaning. Morphology deals with how these morphemes are arranged and combined to form words.

1.5.4 Syntax

The study of the formation of sentences is called syntax. It is about principles of forming and understanding correct sentences. Since sentence is regarded as the largest grammatical unit of language, syntax has long been the center of grammatical study. Different linguistic theories first differ in their treatment of sentence structure. In this book we will briefly introduce four approaches, namely, the traditional approach, the structural approach, the generative approach and the functional approach.

1.5.5 Semantics

The study of meaning is called semantics. It is not only concerned with meanings of words as lexical items, but also with levels of language below the word and above it, e. g. meaning of morphemes and phrases and sentences.

1.5.6 Pragmatics

The study of meaning in context is called pragmatics. It deals with particular utterances in particular situations and is especially concerned with the various ways in which the many social contexts