AN INTRODUCTION TO MODERN ENGLISH LEXICOLOGY

现代英语词汇学导论

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前　言

　　《现代英语词汇学导论》是以语言学理论为指导，以英语词汇为研究对象的可供高等学校英语专业三、四年级学生使用的教程。其主要内容涉及英语构词法、语义学、成语研究、词源学及英语词典学等知识领域。通过对本教程的学习，可使学生比较全面地了解英语词汇的现状及其历史演变的概貌，从而加深对英语词汇的理解，能对现代英语词汇发展的新现象作出分析和解释，对英语词汇具有比较完整的知识，并为学生进一步深入研究英语词法学、语义学、英语成语、词源学及英语词典学等语言学的诸分支奠定良好的基础。

　　对于词汇学的研究，苏联语言学家目前处于领先地位。英美学者对词汇学的研究成果目前一般局限于语言学的各个分支，尚缺乏完整系统的论述。我国对英语词汇学的研究起步较晚，本世纪的七、八十年代相继出现了一些学术论文及少量专著。编著者在长期从事英语词汇学教学的同时，利用业余时间，结合教学体会，将自己的讲稿整理成本书。

　　为编写这本《现代英语词汇学导论》，编著者曾参考国内外学者近年来的研究成果，因限于篇幅，对所引用的观点及材料未能注明出处，在此我们向有关著者和编著表示衷心的感谢。

　　在本书的编著过程中，我们得到很多老师和同事的热情支持和大力帮助。河南大学外语系王曾选教授在百忙中审阅了本书的全部初稿，在河南大学外语系任教的美国教师贝克·诺菲尔德（Becky Neufeld）女士也参加了本书的审阅，我们怀着崇敬的心情向他（她）们表示衷心的感谢。

　　由于编著者水平有限，本书难免有缺点错误，欢迎同行和广大读者批评指正。

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Chapter I

Introduction

I . Definition of lexicology

Lexicology is a branch of linguistics (the science of language). The term *loxicology* is composed of two Greek morphemes: *lexis* meaning "word, phrase" (hence *lexicos* "having to do with words) and *logos* which denotes "learning, a department of knowledge". Thus, the literal meaning of the term *lexicology* is "the science of the word". But the literal meaning gives only a general notion of the aims and subject-matter of the branch of linguistics; the other branches also deal with words from different angles.

Lexicology as a branch of linguistics has its own aims and methods of scientific research. In the narrow sense, it treats of word structure and the development, composition or criterion of the vocabulary; in the broad sense, it embraces etymology (the branch of linguistics that deals with the origin and development of words), semantics (the branch of linguistics which treats of the meaning of words and other units of the language), lexicography (the principles and practices of dictionary making).

On the basis of the above description, *lexicology* may by defined as "a branch of linguistics which deals with the vocabulary of a language in respect to its origin, development, structure, meaning and application".

Distinction is naturally made between general lexicology and special lexicology. General lexicology is part of general linguistics; it is concerned with the study of vocabulary irrespective of the specific features of any

particular language. Special lexicology is the lexicology of a particular language (e. g. Chinese, English, Russian etc.), i. e. the study and description of its vocabulary and vocabulary units, primarily words as the main units of language. Needless to say that each special lexicology is based on the principles worked out and laid down by general lexicology.

Ⅱ. Two approaches to language study

There are two principal approaches in linguistic science to the study of language material, namely the synchronic and the diachronic approaches. With regard to special lexicology the synchronic approach is concerned with the vocabulary of a language as it exists at a given time, for instance, at the present time. It is special descriptive lexicology that deals with the vocabulary and vocabulary units of a particular language at a certain time. The diachronic approach deals with the changes and the development of vocabulary in the course of time. It is special historical lexicology that deals with the evolution of the vocabulary units of a language as time passes. The two approaches are interconnected and interdependent. The synchronic state of the vocabulary of a language is the result of a long process of historical development, while diachronic study is based on tracing and comparing the vocabularies existing in different periods.

Ⅲ. The relation of lexicology to other brahches of linguistics

The word is not studied in lexicology only, it is

studied in other branches of linguistics as well. So lexicology is closely related to general linguistics, the history of the language, phonetics, stylistics and, especially, grammar.

A. Its relation to general linguistics

The study of words constitutes an important part of general linguistics but whereas in general linguistics the word is studied as a unit of language in general, lexicology is occupied with the study of words of a particular language.

B. Its relation to grammar

The interrelation between lexicology and grammar (morphology and syntax) is very clear, since morphology is the study of the forms and formation of words and syntax is concerned with the patterns after which words are combined into word groups and sentences. As is pointed out by Joseph Stalin, the vocabulary is the building material of the language. Just as in construction work the building materials do not constitute the building, although the latter cannot be constructed without them, so too the vocabulary of a language does not constitute the language itself, although no language is conceivable without it. But the vocabulary of a language assumes tremendous importance when it comes under the control of grammar, which defines the rules governing the modification of words and the combination of words into sentences, thus making the language a coherent and significant function.

C. Its relation to phonetics

Phonetics investigates the phonetic structure of language (its system of phonemes and intonation patterns) and studies the outer sound-form of the word. The study of the sound system and sound changes of language is closely related to grammar and lexicology. The expres-

sion of the meaning of words is made possible by means of sounds; meaning depends on the phonemic make-up of words, on the order of the sounds, and on the sound-stress.

D. Its relation to stylistics

Although lexicology is not directly concerned with the use of words, and still less with the use of proper words at proper places, which is the business of a student of style, the relation of lexicology to stylistics is a very close one. But since lexicology is to touch on archaism, colloquialism, neologisms, dialects, slang, jargan, taboo and euphemism, etc. different styles have to be discussed. Stylistics from a different angle studies many problems treated in lexicology, such as the problems of meaning, synonymy, differentiation of vocabulary according to the sphere of communication, etc.

E. Its relation to the history of the English language

The volume and character of the vocabulary are determined by the social-economic and cultural history of the people speaking the language. A vocabulary is a kind of mirror reflecting the character, the mentality and the activity of the people who use it. Thus the political and social events in the course of English history have had great effect on the English language. It is generally known that the Anglo-Saxon invasion, and their subsequent settlement in Britain, the Scandinavian invasion and the Norman Conquest were three of the most important landmarks in the history of the English people as well as in the history of the English language. Angles, Saxons and Jutes brought the English language to Britain. The English language, as we know it, had its beginning in the speech which these invaders brought with them. These invaders had been in contact with Roman civilization and had adopted some Latin words denoting objects

belonging to that civilization before their invasion. These words are typical of the early Roman commercial penetration, e. g. *bargain, cheap, pound, cup, wine* and *dish*, etc. The Scandinavian invasions resulted in a considerable mixture of the two races and their languages. The more simple speech of Old Norse peoples with some later Dutch and Scandinavian words has strengthened the original Germanic character of English. The Norman Conquest made English the language for the common-people for two centuries, while the nobles and those associated with them used French on all occasions and when English once more regained supremacy as the language of the whole nation, it was greatly changed from what it had been in 1066.

The next important event affecting English vocabulary was the Renaissance, or the Revival of Learning along with the growth of modern capitalism. Greek began to be taught at Gambridge University about 1540, and one result was the influx of Greek words into English, in addition to such words as had been introduced through the medium of Latin. Surrey (poet) and Wyatt (poet)and others introduced a knowledge of Italian literature, which soon had an effect upon the drama. Italian words came in through this influence. The discoveries of Columbus and the opening up of the New World brought the English into contact with Spanish, and through it, many American Indian words were introduced. Then came the period of the expansion of the British Empire and with it the borrowing of Indian, Malayan, African, and even Chinese words. The great advance in science and technology has made the creation of many words necessary, e. g. *moon-walk, microform, microwave stove, deep-space*. The two World Wars have introduced thousands of new words into English, e. g. *neutron bomb, chain*

reaction. and *missile.*

The historical development of the English vocabulary. which is the subject-matter of the course of modern English lexicology occupies an outstanding place in the history of the English language; on the other hand, the course can only afford to give a brief account of the historical development. It is evident that our course is closely related to the study of the history of the English language.

Ⅳ. The aims and significance of the course of

modern English lexicology

Modern English Lexicology aims at giving a systematic description of the word-stock of Modern English. It forms the study of one of the three main aspects of language. i. e. its vocabulary. grammar and sound system. Lexicology came into being to meet the needs of many different branches of applied linguistics. namely. of lexicography. literary criticism. standardization of terminology and. last but not least. of foreign language teaching. It is very very important to enlarge one's vocabulary in learning a language. A knowledge of the principles of word formation and large numbers of roots and affixes will be very helpful in studying the words formed by them. as we could infer the meaning by looking at their component parts. It can also furnish a tool helping the students guess and retain in his memory the meaning of new words by comparing and contrasting them with the previously learned elements and patterns. Moreover, a general study of synonyms, lexical layers and figures of speech will be of help in choosing the right and expressive words in speech and writing. The English

language teacher may also find the course of Modern English Lexicology helpful. It may help him to decide on the words to be taught and order of presenting them: it may help him to find more efficient methods of enlarging his students' vocabulary and improving their ability to analyze and apply words.

Questions and Exercises

1. What is lexicology? What does it treat of in the narrow sense and in the broad sense?
2. What are two principal approaches to language study?
3. What is the relation of lexicology to other branches of linguistics?
4. Why must the English vocabulary be studied in the light of the history of the English language?
5. Give examples to show the English language was influenced by Roman civilization before Angles, Saxons and Jutes invaded Britain:
6. What are the aims and significance of the course of Modern English Lexicology?

A General Survey of a Word

I . Definition of a word

The definition of a *word* has occupied the attention
of men for ages. The ancient Greeks had long ago spec-
ulated about the nature and substance of a word, and
there were heated controversies about its definition. In
China, the definition of a word, as distinguished from a
hieroglyph, has been the subject of much discussion.
In Europe and America, scholars or linguists have made
various attempts to define the word in accurate and sci-
entific terms, but no exhaustive definition of the word
has yet been given by linguists. The fact is that the
definition of a word is one of the most difficult problems
in linguistics because the simplest word has many dif-
ferent aspects. It has a sound form because it is a certain
arrangement of phonemes; it has its morphological struc-
ture, being also a certain arrangement of morphemes;
when used in actual speech, it may occur in different
word-forms, and signal various meanings. Being a unit
of sound, a unit of meaning and a unit of morphology,
the word itself is a peculiar complex, the definition of
which involves both problems of linguistics and prob-
lems of philosophy, psychology and a few other
branches of knowledge.

A few examples will suffice to show that any defini-
tion is conditioned by the aims and interests of its
author. Thomas Hobbes (1588—1679), one of the great
English philosophers, revealed a materialistic approach
to the problem of nomination when he wrote that words

are not mere sounds but names of matter.

Within the scope of linguistics the word has been defined syntactically, semantically, phonologically and by combining various approaches.

The word has been syntactically defined, for instance, as "the minimum sentence" by H. Sweet and much later by L. Bloomfield as "a minimum free form". This last definition, although structural in orientation, may be said to be, to a certain degree, equivalent to Sweet's, as practically, it amounts to the same thing: free forms are later defined as "forms which occur as sentences".

E. Sapir takes into consideration the syntactic and semantic aspects when he calls the word "one of the smallest, completely satisfying bits of isolated 'meaning', into which the sentence resolves itself". Sapir also points out once more very important characteristic of the word, its indivisibility: "It cannot be cut into without a disturbance of meaning, one or two other or both of the several parts remaining as a helpless waif on our hands." The essence of indivisibility will be clear from a comparison of the article *a* and the prefix *a-* in *a lion* and *alive. A lion* is a word-group because we can separate its elements and insert other words between them: *a living lion, a dead lion. Alive* is a word: it is indivisible, i.e. structurally impermeable; nothing can be inserted between its elements.

A purely semantic treatment will be found in Stephen Ullmann's explanation: with him connected discourse, if analyzed from the semantic point of view, "will fall into a certain number of meaningful segments which are ultimately composed of meaningful units. These meaningful units are termed words."

The semantic-phonological approach may be illus-

trated by Gardiner's definition: "A word is an articulate sound-symbol in its aspect of denoting something which is spoken about."

The eminent French linguist A. Meillet combines the semantic, phonological and grammatical criteria and advances a formula which underlies many subsequent definitions, including this one: "A word is defined by the association of a particular meaning with a particular group of sounds susceptible of a particular grammatical employment."

This definition does not permit us to distinguish words from phrases because not only *child*, but also *a pretty child* are combinations of a particular group of sounds with a particular meaning capable of a particular grammatical employment.

We can accept this formula if we add that the word is the smallest significant unit of a given language, capable of functioning alone. (It might be objected that such words as articles, conjunctions and a few other words never occur as sentences, but they are not numerous and could be collected into a list of exceptions.) This addition is necessary because it permits us to create a basis for the contrasts between the word and the phrase, the word and the phoneme, and the word and the morpheme: their common feature is that they are all units of the language, their difference lies in the fact that the phoneme is not significant, and a morpheme cannot be used as a complete utterance.

To sum up, a word has the following four characteristics: 1) A word is a sound unit in human speech, not in the sounds made by animals. 2) A word is a sound unit in human speech denoting an individual phenomenon of reality. The meaning of a word is invested in a phoneme or several phonemes. But the phoneme