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# Modern Linguistics
# 现代语言学

(附:现代语言学自学考试大纲)

全国高等教育自学考试指导委员会组编

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# 组编前言

当您开始阅读本书时，人类已经迈入了21世纪。

这是一个变幻难测的世纪，这是一个催人奋进的时代，科学技术飞速发展，知识更替日新月异。希望、困惑、机遇、挑战，随时随地都有可能出现在每一个社会成员的生活之中。抓住机遇，寻求发展，迎接挑战，适应变化的制胜法宝就是学习——依靠自己学习，终生学习。

作为我国高等教育组成部分的自学考试，其职责就是在高等教育这个水平上倡导自学、鼓励自学、帮助自学、推动自学，为每一个自学者铺就成才之路，组织编写供读者学习的教材就是履行这个职责的重要环节。毫无疑问，这种教材应当适合自学，应当有利于学习者掌握、了解新知识、新信息，有利于学习者增强创新意识、培养实践能力、形成自学能力，也有利于学习者学以致用、解决实际工作中所遇到的问题。具有如此特点的书，我们虽然沿用了“教材”这个概念，但它与那种仅供教师讲、学生听，教师不讲、学生不懂，以“教”为中心的教科书相比，已经在内容安排、形式体例、行文风格等方面都大不相同了。希望读者对此有所了解，以便从一开始就树立起依靠自己学习的坚定信念，不断探索适合自己的学习方法，充分利用已有的知识基础和实际工作经验，最大限度地发挥自己的潜能达到学习的目标。

欢迎读者提出意见和建议。

祝每一位读者自学成功。

全国高等教育自学考试指导委员会

1999年

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# CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1. What is linguistics?

### 1.1 Definition

Linguistics is generally defined as the **scientific study of language**. The word "language" preceded by the zero article in English implies that linguistics studies not any particular language, e.g., English, Chinese, Arabic, and Latin, but languages in general. The word "study" does not mean "learn" but "investigate" or "examine." And the word "scientific" refers to the way in which it is studied. A scientific study of language is based on the systematic investigation of data, conducted with reference to some general theory of language structure. In order to discover the nature of the underlying language system, what the linguist has to do first is to study language facts, i.e., to see how language is actually used; then he formulates some hypotheses about the language structure. But the hypotheses thus formed have to be checked repeatedly against the observed facts. In linguistics, as in any other discipline, data and theory stand in a dialectical complementation; that is, a theory without the support of data can hardly claim validity, and data without being explained by some theory remain a muddled mass of things.

Thus the process of linguistic study can be summarized as follows: First, certain linguistic facts are observed, which are found to display some similarities, and generalizations are made about

them; next, based on these generalizations, hypotheses are formulated to account for these facts; and then the hypotheses are tested by further observations; and finally a linguistic theory is constructed about what language is and how it works.

## 1.2 The scope of linguistics

The study of language as a whole is often called **general linguistics**. This deals with the basic concepts, theories, descriptions, models and methods applicable in any linguistic study, in contrast to those branches of study which relate linguistics to the research of other areas.

Language is a complicated entity with multiple layers and facets, so it is hardly possible for the linguists to deal with it all at once. They have to concentrate on one aspect of it at a time.

What first drew the attention of the linguists were the sounds used in languages. This study of sounds used in linguistic communication led to the establishment of a branch of linguistics called **phonetics**.

Then, as linguists became interested in how sounds are put together and used to convey meaning in communication, they developed another branch of study related to sounds called **phonology**.

While sounds are primary in linguistic communication, they are represented by certain symbols, i.e., words and even smaller components called morphemes. The study of the way in which these symbols are arranged to form words has constituted the branch of study called **morphology**.

Then the combination of these words to form permissible sentences in languages is governed by rules. The study of these rules constitutes a major branch of linguistic studies, i.e., **syntax**.

But the ultimate objective of language is not just to create gram-

matically well-formed sentences, but to convey meaning. So the study of meaning was gradually developed and became known as **semantics.**

Language communication does not occur in a vacuum. It always occurs in a context, i.e., it always occurs at a certain time, at a certain place, between participants with particular intentions. When the study of meaning is conducted, not in isolation, but in the context of use, it becomes another branch of linguistic study called **pragmatics.**

The study of all these aspects of language forms the core of linguistics.

Then, language is not an isolated phenomenon; it is a social activity carried out in a certain social environment by human beings. Naturally, in the course of time the study of language has established close links with other branches of social studies, resulting in interdisciplinary branches of linguistic study.

Language and society are closely connected. The language a person uses often reveals his social background, and there exist social norms that determine the type of language to be used on a certain occasion; and language changes are often caused by social changes. The study of all these social aspects of language and its relation with society form the core of the branch called **sociolinguistics.**

**Psycholinguistics** relates the study of language to psychology. It aims to answer such questions as how the human mind works when we use language, how we as infants acquire our mother tongue, how we memorize, and how we process the information we receive in the course of communication.

Findings in linguistic studies can often be applied to the solution of such practical problems as the recovery of speech ability. The study of such applications is generally known as **applied linguistics.** But in a narrow sense applied linguistics refers to the application of

linguistic theories and principles to language teaching, especially the teaching of foreign and second languages. Language teachers should first of all learn the language rules before they can teach these rules to the students; teaching material development, teaching syllabus design, evaluation of teaching and learning are all guided by linguistic principles and theories. The emergence of a new teaching approach or method often follows the emergence of a new linguistic theory.

Other related branches include anthropological linguistics, neurological linguistics, mathematical linguistics, and computational linguistics.

## 1.3 Some important distinctions in linguistics

### 1.3.1 Prescriptive vs. descriptive

If a linguistic study describes and analyzes the language people actually use, it is said to be **descriptive**; if it aims to lay down rules for "correct" behaviour, i.e., to tell people what they should say and what they should not say, it is said to be **prescriptive**.

Modern linguistics, i.e., linguistic study carried out in this century is mostly descriptive. It differs from the linguistic study normally known as "grammar." Early grammars were based on "high" (religious, literary) written language. They set models for language users to follow. And today, the grammar taught to learners of a language is still basically prescriptive. It tells the learner what he should say, or what is supposed to be correct usage. On the other hand, modern linguistics is mostly descriptive. Linguistic study is supposed to be scientific and objective and the task of linguists is supposed to describe the language people actually use, be it "correct" or not. Linguists believe that whatever occurs in the language people use should be described and analyzed in their investigation.



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