英语专业系列教材

A NEW CONCISE INTRODUCTION TO LINGUISTICS FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

商洛学院英语专业综合改革试点项目资助成果
长江大学翻译研究中心基金项目资助、外国语学院学科建设成果
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新编简明英语语言学概论

马 琰
王 峰 编著

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内 容 简 介

本书旨在增长英语学习者的语言学理论知识，提高其综合运用语言的能力。全书共分12章，涉及语音学、音位学、形态学、句法学、语义学、话语分析、语言习得、语言与文化、语言与翻译研究等。每章设有要点提示、术语解释、练习题、本章小结、扩展阅读、参阅书目、名家简介等板块，书后附有语言学术语表、3套综合自测题以及全书的练习题参考答案。

本书适合英语专业学生使用，也可供英语专业研究生入学考试或高等教育自学考试备考之用。

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前言
Preface

英语是一门国际性的语言，在全世界有着广泛的影响力。“英语语言学”是高校英语语言文学专业课程设置中一门重要的基础课，该课程旨在揭示语言的基本特征与规律，系统描述英语语言的结构、构成、使用原则、变异，及其与社会、文化和翻译之间的关系等，激发学生的语言学习兴趣，提高学生的语言学习效率，促进学生听说读写译能力的提高，培养学生的创新能力，也能为学生学习测试学、教学法、学术论文写作等相关课程打下良好的专业基础。

《新编简明英语语言学概论》的编写主要针对广大高校英语专业学生的实际情况，根据课程教学大纲，精选传统语言学理论知识与现代语言学前沿成果，语言简明扼要、通俗易懂、举例详尽，减小学习难度。同时，帮助学生更好地掌握语言学理论，指导学生运用语言学理论解释语言现象，提高学生的英语综合水平，促进其他专业课程的学习，对学生考研成功率的提高也有良好的促进作用。

本书分为12章。第1章为绪论，介绍语言的属性、功能、起源等。第2章介绍语言学的基本理论、研究范围、重要分类等。第3–12章从语音学、音位学、形态学、句法学、语义学、语用学、话语分析、语言与文化和社会、第一语言习得和第二语言习得、语言学与翻译研究等角度系统介绍英语语言学及相关学科理论知识。除了要点提示、核心理论、术语解释、练习题和本章小结外，每章还精选中英文扩展阅读材料各1篇，介绍中外语言学界代表人物及其主要理论思想或学术成果，供学生拓展或深入学习。书后附有语言学术语表和3套自测题。

本书第一作者为商洛学院语言文化传播学院讲师马琰老师，完成了本书约40万字的内容。第二作者为长江大学外国语学院硕士生导师、翻译研究中心副主任王峰，编写了第10章和第12章的部分内容，并对其他章节作了审校和润色。

商洛学院语言文化传播学院王正良教授、长江大学外国语学院杨先明教授、潘翠琼教授、张玉宏博士等对本书的内容选择、框架设计、概念定义等提出了合理建议；书中参考引用了众多语言研究专家，特别是胡壮麟教授、杨信彰教授、戴炜栋教授、王永祥教授等的语言学教程或最新科研成果，特别致以诚挚的感谢！

由于编者水平有限，书中难免存在瑕疵，敬请同行、专家批评指正。

编者

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Chapter 1

Introduction

要点提示

语言的本质（符号性、任意性、系统性、有声性和人类交际性）

人类语言的识别性特征（任意性、多产性、移位性、二重性和文化传递）

语言的功能（生理、寒暄、记录、识别、推理、交际和愉悦）

语言的起源（神授说、人造说、进化说等）

1.1 The Definition of Language

For years, many philosophers, historians, and linguists have been making great efforts to give the definition of language from different points of view. They approached language with their special emphasis and formed different opinions about it.

Webster's New World Dictionary defines language as "a system of vocal sounds and combinations of such sounds to which meaning is attributed, used for the expression or communication of thoughts and feelings; the written representation of such a system". *Longman Dictionary* defines it as "a system of communication by written or spoken words, which is used by the people of a particular country or area".

American structuralist Edward Sapir claimed that "language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols" (Sapir, 1921).

Mario Pei and Frank Gaynor (1954) in *A Dictionary of Linguistics* regard language as "a system of communication by sound, i.e. through the organs of speech and hearing, among human beings of a certain group or community, using vocal symbols possessing arbitrary conventional meanings".

The 1985 edition of *Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics* defines language as "the system of human communication by means of a structured arrangement of sounds (or their written representation) to form larger units, e.g. morphemes, words, sentences".

In *Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics*, language is defined as "a vehicle for the expression or exchange of thoughts, concepts, knowledge, and information as well as the fixing and transmission of experience and knowledge. It is based on cognitive processes, subject to societal factors and subject to historical change and development" (Bussmann, 2000: 253).

Many sociolinguists (e.g. M.A.K. Halliday) regard it as an activity which consists of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Behaviorists (e.g. B.F. Skinner) see language in terms of operant behavior and equate human beings with pigeons.

The transformationalists (e.g. N. Chomsky) see language as an internalized system of rules and equate human beings with automata.

1.2 The Nature of Language

We can see that each of the above-mentioned linguists has his own focus on defining language, but no one has provided a definition which can satisfy everyone. A perfect and satisfactory definition has yet to come. However, the primary and common senses in language have made most linguists come to a general agreement: "Language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication" (Wardhaugh, 1979: 3). Although it is short, this definition has covered the main features of language.

1.2.1 Language Is a System

Language is rule-governed, and elements in it are arranged according to certain rules; it can't be combined at will. This property of language explains why "ibke" is not a possible sound combination in English, while "bike" is; why "been he to has New York" is not a grammatically acceptable sentence in English, while "he has been to New York" is. The particular fixed ways or designs in which a language operates make the formation of words from sounds; sentences from words and paragraphs from sentences possible, and make speakers of a language understand each other. If language were not constructed on the basis of certain system which makes it grammatically correct and logically acceptable, it could not be learned or used and understood consistently.

1.2.2 Language Is Arbitrary

Language is arbitrary in the sense that language uses neutral symbols, which is fully explained by Saussure. There is no intrinsic or logical relationship between a word and the thing it denotes. In other words, the linguistic form has no natural or iconic relationship with what the symbol stands for. The link between them is a

matter of convention, and conventions differ radically across languages. For example, there is no motivated connection between the word "chair" and the thing we used to sit on. The reason is that English-speaking people all used this symbol for it as a convention at the very beginning.

Another example of arbitrariness of language is found in the fact that different languages have different linguistic expressions for the same object. For example, in English, people use "university" to stand for the educational institution. But in Chinese, people use "大学", in French, "université", etc.

Homophones also show the arbitrariness of language. Within the same language, the same sound form may represent two or more different meanings. For example, in English, "write" and "right" have exactly the same pronunciation [rait], but they differ greatly in meaning.

Synonymy, which refers to the existence of the same meaning being represented by different sound forms, is the fourth evidence. For instance, "begin" and "commence" are two forms with the same meaning in English.

The only exceptions for this rule are onomatopoetic or echoic words such as "bang" and "cuckoo". However, Widdowson argues that arbitrariness and onomatopoeic effect may work at the same time (Widdowson, 1996: 6). Some compound words are also not entirely arbitrary. For instance, while "type" and "writer" are both arbitrary, the compound word "typewriter" is not entirely arbitrary.

According to systemic functionalists and American functionalists, language is less arbitrary at the syntactic level (杨信彰, 2005: 7). As we know, language is systematic; therefore the order of elements in a sentence should follow certain rules. Compare the following two sentences:

a) He stood up and left.

b) He stood up after he left.

In a), the phrases are placed in the same order as the actions happen. However, in b) the use of a syntactic device reverses the sequence of the two actions.

1.2.3 Language Is Symbolic

This explains the third feature of language: words are just symbols; they are

associated with objects, actions, ideas, etc. by convention. The 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."

In language, two types of symbols may be identified: visual and auditory symbols. The traffic signals belong to the former while whistles and drum beats to the latter. Vocal symbols, which are produced by human speech organs, are part of auditory symbols (王永祥，支永碧, 2007: 5).

1.2.4 Language Is Vocal

Language is vocal as the primary medium for all languages is sound. All evidence points to the fact that writing systems came into being much later than the spoken forms and that they are only used to capture sounds and meanings on wood and stone. The fact that children acquire spoken language before they can read or write also indicates that language is primarily vocal (戴炜栋，何兆熊, 2002: 9).

Describing spoken language, people generally recognize three kinds of units: sounds, syllables, and words. In English, difference in certain words may be found in their written form rather than their spoken one. For instance, the difference of meaning between "witch" and "which" in English cannot be identified in their spoken form without context. Conversely, words in the written form may be pronounced differently. The English word "read" can be pronounced as [ri:d] when used in the present tense and as [red] in the past tense.

1.2.5 Language Is for Human Communication

Language is only used by human beings to communicate with each other. With language, people can talk to one another and exchange their ideas. There are certain characteristics in human language that cannot be found in animal communication systems. For example, birds' songs express only simple emotions such as fear, warnings, anger or happiness. Bees' dances indicate just simple things such as source of food. Their communications, usually without significant discrete arbitrary symbols, are closely and directly related to their basic needs of life. However, human languages can express very complex ideas. They can make a request, promote a sale or name an

object, allowing people to live and work together.

According to Yang Xinzhang, human language is generally said to be different from animal communication in the following aspects. a) Language has the ability to refer to things far removed in time and space. b) Humans have the ability to produce and understand an indefinite number of novel utterances. c) Learning is much more important as a factor in human language than in animal communication. Human languages have very much in common, but they differ from one another on many specific points. d) Language is complex in its structure. Every sentence of a human language has a complex grammatical structure and consists of a linear string of words. e) Animal communication systems are closed, whereas human languages are open-ended. People can talk about anything they can observe or imagine. What they can say on any given topics is almost unlimited. f) Humans can perform acts with language just as they can with objects of different kinds (杨信彰, 2007: 10-11).

1.3 The Design Features of Language

We all take it for granted that language is essential to human beings and human language is more complicated, flexible, unrestrained and capable than languages used by other species. In a word, human language is so distinctive from animal languages. The properties of human language that distinguish it from any animal system of communication are called design features—A framework proposed by the American linguist Charles Hockett. The comparisons between human language and animal communication systems could make us have a better knowledge of the nature of human language. To be discussed below are five features unique only to human language.

1.3.1 Arbitrariness

As we have discussed, the arbitrariness of language means that there is no intrinsic or logical relationship between a word and the thing it denotes. The link between them is a matter of convention, and conventions differ radically across

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