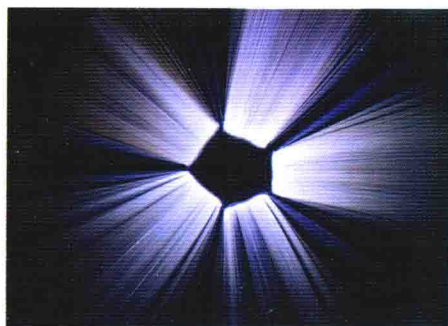


An Introduction to  
Modern Linguistics



# 现代语言学 流派简介

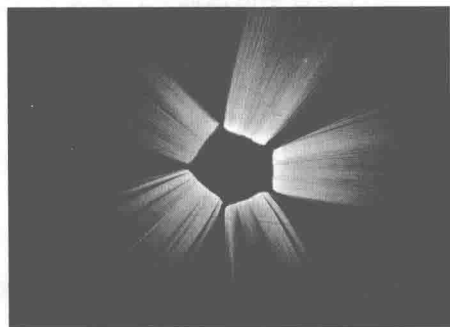
沈莹 / 主编

谢建奎 / 副主编



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# 前 言

20世纪的现代语言学理论，在语言学史上是发展最快、最活跃的。自瑞士语言学家索绪尔开创了结构主义理论并把语言学真正变成科学之后，现代语言学摆脱了古老传统的重负，其取得的卓著成就使语言学成了一门“领先的科学”。本书是现代语言学理论的一个概论，最大特点就是“概”。本书以现代语言学奠基人索绪尔的理论开始，沿着欧美两条线介绍了20世纪的主流语言学理论流派，重点阐述了20世纪80年代以后蓬勃发展起来的认知语言学流派，其中有功能主义学派中影响最大的布拉格学派、伦敦学派以及在伦敦学派影响下发展起来的系统功能语言学派，也有与之大不同的美国描写主义和结构主义语言学派，以及转换生成语言学派。

根据Flesch-Kincaid readability tests（可读性测试）<sup>[1]</sup>的检测结果（基于Coh-Metrix软件的统计），本书具有一定的可读性特征。

可读性指标如下表所示：

章节排序	可读指数 (Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease)	可读性年级水平 (Flesch-Kincaid Reading Level)
第一章	43	12年级(美国17~18岁学生)
第二章	51.5	10年级(美国15~16岁学生)
第三章	53.6	10年级(美国15~16岁学生)
第四章	44.2	11年级(美国17~18岁学生)
第五章	42.3	13年级(美国19~20岁学生)
第六章	44.1	11年级(美国17~18岁学生)
平均	46.45	11年级(美国17~18岁学生)

[1] 英国《卫报》(2013)利用Flesch-Kincaid readability tests（可读性测试）追踪了历届总统的国情咨文，结果发现，奥巴马2012年的国情咨文的可读性测试分数是8年级水平，而美国第四任总统詹姆斯·麦迪逊（James Madison）在1815年发表的国情咨文的可读性指数达到了最高点：23.5。

从以上表格不难看出，本书的平均可读指数比较高(46.45)，相当于美国11年级17~18岁学生的阅读水平。参照此数据，本书读者拟设定为非英语母语者的英语专业硕士生一年级以及英语专业本科生3~4年级的学生。除此以外，本书还具备有以下特点：选材新颖，语言地道，趣味性较强；知识全面，基本上涵盖了现代语言学的主要流派；语言与专业知识学习并重；教学模块设置合理，根据具体的教学需要合理设置每个单元的教学模块；根据所讲内容精心编写可供课后思考的关键和核心问题，使学习者能带着问题意识学习和消化现代语言学的基本概念，了解其起源和发展脉络，为进一步了解当今的语言学现状打下坚实的理论基础。

本书各章节的编写分工如下：沈莹（第一章、第三章、第六章）、谢建奎（第五章）、李恺（第二章）、曾尚春（第四章）、徐东群（第六章）。

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沈 莹

2017年3月8日于广西大学

# CONTENTS

<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b>	/ 1
1.1 Notion of Language	/ 1
1.2 Design Features of Language	/ 2
1.3 Notion of Linguistics	/ 4
1.4 Differences Between Schools and Branches	/ 5
1.4.1 Branches of Linguistics	/ 5
1.4.2 Schools of Linguistics	/ 5
1.5 Major Distinctions Between Language and Linguistics	/ 6
<b>Chapter 2 The Beginning of Modern Linguistics</b>	/ 9
2.1 A Brief Introduction to Saussure	/ 9
2.2 The Source of Saussure's Thought	/ 9
2.3 Saussure's Contributions to Linguistics	/ 10
2.4 Saussure's Legacy	/ 12
<b>Chapter 3 Early European Functionalism</b>	/ 15
3.1 Background of the Prague School	/ 15
3.2 Theories of Language of the Prague School	/ 16
3.3 Functional Sentence Perspective	/ 18
3.4 Information Structure and Sentence Structure	/ 19
3.4.1 General Concept of Information Structure and Sentence Structure	/ 19
3.4.2 Two Principles in the Information Structure and Sentence Structure	/ 20
3.4.3 Manifestations of Information Structure	/ 20
3.4.4 Summary	/ 20
3.5 The Copenhagen School	/ 21
3.5.1 Background of the Copenhagen School	/ 21
3.5.2 Linguistic Theories About Language from the Copenhagen School	/ 21

3.6	The London School	/ 22
3.6.1	B. Malinowski	/ 22
3.6.2	J.R. Firth	/ 23

## **Chapter 4 Systemic-functional Linguistic Theory** / 27

4.1	A Brief Introduction to M.A.K. Halliday	/ 27
4.2	Halliday's View on Language	/ 28
4.2.1	Formation of Halliday's View on Language	/ 28
4.2.2	Six Core Ideas of Systemic-functional Grammar	/ 29
4.3	Systemic Grammar	/ 31
4.3.1	Basic Concepts	/ 31
4.3.2	Five Formulas of System Network	/ 32
4.3.3	Realization of System	/ 34
4.4	Functional Grammar	/ 36
4.4.1	Ideational Function	/ 37
4.4.2	Interpersonal Function	/ 41
4.4.3	Textual Function	/ 43
4.5	Halliday and Sociolinguistics	/ 45
4.5.1	A Brief Introduction to Sociolinguistics	/ 45
4.5.2	Halliday's Systemic-functional Linguistics and Sociolinguistics	/ 46

## **Chapter 5 American Descriptive Linguistics and Structuralism** / 51

5.1	Beginning of American Linguistics	/ 51
5.2	Boas' Linguistic Viewpoint and Contribution	/ 52
5.3	Sapir and Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis	/ 54
5.3.1	Edward Sapir	/ 54
5.3.2	Benjamin Lee Whorf	/ 55
5.3.3	Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis	/ 56
5.4	Bloomfield's Theory	/ 58

5.5	Harris' Linguistic Views	/ 62
5.6	Hockett's Grammatical Description	/ 64
5.7	Pike's Tagmemics	/ 66
5.8	Summary	/ 69

## **Chapter 6 Transformational Generative Grammar** / 73

6.1	A Brief Introduction to Noam Chomsky	/ 73
6.2	Chomsky's Philosophy of Language	/ 75
6.2.1	Overview	/ 75
6.2.2	The Innateness Hypothesis	/ 76
6.2.3	Universal Grammar and Particular Grammar	/ 77
6.2.4	Generative Grammar	/ 78
6.3	The Classical Theory	/ 79
6.3.1	Finite State Grammar	/ 80
6.3.2	Phrase Structure Grammar	/ 81
6.3.3	Transformational Grammar	/ 83
6.4	The Standard Theory	/ 85
6.4.1	Deep Structure VS Surface Structure	/ 85
6.4.2	The Base Component	/ 86
6.4.3	The Lexicon	/ 87
6.5	The Extended Standard Theory	/ 88
6.5.1	X-bar Theory	/ 90
6.5.2	$\alpha$ -movement	/ 92
6.5.3	Logical Form	/ 95
6.6	Government and Binding Theory	/ 96
6.6.1	Universal Grammar and Core Grammar	/ 97
6.6.2	Principle System	/ 98
6.7	The Minimalist Program	/ 100
6.8	Summary	/ 101



# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Notion of Language

Language is central to our nature as human beings, yet it seems it is the last thing we can reasonably study objectively—we have to examine everything else (in the physical world) before we can explore how we think and how we communicate.

There is at least one good reason for this. Language is a social artifact—a tool. People who use tools do not generally spend time studying them. We tend to take it for granted. However, our lives depend increasingly on fast and successful communication nowadays. We often blame our poor communication for our personal or global problems. Even machines are “learning” to use language. Linguistics today is at a stage similar to early physics or biology, a time in which a variety of more or less competing hypotheses and systems of description have not yet given way to one agreed view.

Apart from the fact that linguistics is simply too recent to be a unified science, there are five other reasons:

- 1) Human language has shown itself to be an extremely complex phenomenon, far more so than most educated people appreciate.
- 2) Unlike other sciences, which use language to handle something else, linguistics has to use language to describe language, which is a demanding exercise.
- 3) Language is by its very nature beyond the total grasp of any one human or group of humans.
- 4) Language, like thought, is both a private and a shared phenomenon, and until we understand what is brain or mind, we can only study the product rather than how language is produced, stored, memorized, and used as part of “consciousness.”
- 5) Sometimes, higher-order groupings can be made, as in such notions “the Romance languages,” “the Germanic languages,” “Creole languages”—all this will fall under the heading of “natural languages” which contrasts with artificial languages. At the highest level of abstraction, it refers to the biological faculty which enables all normal human beings to learn

and use their language.

Above all, we can conclude the definition of language as “Language is defined as a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication.”

“Arbitrary” implies that there is no physical or intrinsic connection between the sounds and the entities in the world to which they refer.

“Vocal” means that the primary medium of language is sound (language is spoken).

“Symbol” stands for another way of looking at arbitrariness.

“Human” means species-specific, unique, and no system of animal communication is like our human language.

## 1.2 Design Features of Language

The term is taken from Charles Hockett; it refers to a number of general properties in respect of which language may be compared with other semiotic systems used by man or by animals.

1) Arbitrariness: It is used to contrast with iconicity (geometrically similar). It is important for versatility/adaptability. It means that there is no natural or inevitable link between the word and the thing it stands for. One sequence of sounds is no better suited to that purpose than another. But there are two ways in which linguistic signs may be motivated. First, there are cases of onomatopoeia, where the sounds of the words mimic some natural sounds. Some may be partially motivated as the word “typewriter.”

2) Duality: also known as “double articulation.” There are two levels of structural organization: phonological and grammatical.

3) Productivity: This enables the speaker to construct and understand an indefinitely large number of utterances, including utterances they have never heard of. (There are utterances whose novelty does not consist solely in that they have never occurred in the previous experience, but in their acknowledged originality of style; and it is for this kind of novelty or originality that the term “creativity” is most appropriate. Whether creativity is a property of language or a characteristic feature of the use of language by particular speakers or writers is still debatable.)

4) Discreteness: The term applies to the signal-elements of semiotic system. If the elements are discrete, in the sense that difference between them is absolute and does not admit of gradation in terms of more or less in quantity, the system is said to be discrete; otherwise it is continuous. The word forms in language are either absolutely the same or absolutely different. Discreteness is not logically dependent upon arbitrariness; but it interacts with it to increase the semiotic flexibility of the system. Two different words may differ

minimally and may be forms of lexemes that are not at all similar in meaning (bear—pear). The fact that minimally-distinct forms may be forms of lexemes that differ considerably in meaning and belong to different grammatical classes also has the effect of enhancing their discreteness when channel-noise tends to destroy the physical differences in the signal.

5) Displacement: It is possible for us to refer to objects and events that are remote in time and place from the act of utterance itself. It is first defined by Hockett as “a message is displaced to the extent that the key features in its antecedents and consequences are removed from the time and place of transmission.” (Displacement in children’s speech comes much later.)

6) Interchangeability: “Any organism equipped for the transmission of the messages in the system is also equipped to receive messages in the same system” (Hockett, 1958). It is important that we are both senders and receivers using essentially the same system. In many kinds of animal signaling behavior, this is not so. It is not uncommon for members of one sex to produce mating signals which only members of the other sex will respond to.

7) Complete feedback: It refers to the fact that a speaker hears and is able to monitor his own performance. This is not solely a matter of monitoring the signal for audibility, it also involves the checking of one’s own utterances for comprehensibility and correctness of formation as they are produced and making adjustments when these are judged necessary.

8) Cultural transmission: It is opposed to genetic transmission, and it has to do with the fact that the ability to speak a language is passed on from one generation to the next by teaching and learning, rather than by instinct. Even the strongest form of the hypothesis that children are born with knowledge of certain universal principles which determine the structure of language must allow that a very considerable part of the structure of a language is acquired. At the same time, it must be recognized that much of the signaling behaviors of other species that was once thought to be purely instinctive is now known to be acquired by a combination of instinct and learning.

9) Learnability: This makes it possible for any human being of whatever race to learn in childhood any language equally well. (It is to decide to what degree learnability applies to non-human semiotic systems. Some birds can imitate the songs of other species.)

10) Reflexivity: Also known as reflexiveness or reflectiveness. It means that languages can refer to and describe themselves. We use language to talk about language. This creates particular problems for linguists. They must have available technical vocabulary to distinguish between the reflexive and non-reflexive use of language. (e.g. Socrates has 8 letters.) No non-human semiotic systems have this property. Human language has both an expressive and descriptive function.

## 1.3 Notion of Linguistics

Linguistics is defined as the scientific study of language. As an academic discipline, the development of this subject has been recent and rapid, having become particularly widely known and taught in the 1960s. This reflects partly an increased popular and specialist interest in the study of language and communication in relation to human beliefs and behavior and the realization of the need for a separate discipline to deal with the range and complexity of linguistic phenomena; partly the impact of the subject's own internal development at this time, arising largely out of the work of Chomsky whose powerful theoretical claims gave linguistics an unprecedented scope and applicability.

When we say the scientific study of language, we can ask how "scientific" is scientific? There are often four principles to follow in order to be scientific.

1) Objectivity: An objective account is one which attempts to capture the nature of the object studied in a way that does not depend on any features of the particular person who studies it. An objective account is, in this sense, impartial, one which could ideally be accepted by any person, because it does not draw on any assumptions, prejudices, or values of particular subjects. This feature of objectivity means that disputes can be contained to the object studied. Some people regard science as objective in this sense and this objectivity is often accompanied by scientific measurement that can be tested independent from the individual scientist who proposes them. This gives it testability and reproducibility. Then the results of measurement must be communicated from person to person, and also demonstrated for third parties, as an advance in understanding of the objective world. Such knowledge confers powers of prediction or technical construction. However, this traditional view about objectivity ignores several things. First, the selection of the object to measure is typically a subjective decision and it often involves reductionism. Second, more problematic is the selection of instruments and methodology. Some features of the object under study will be ignored in the measurement process and the limitations of the chosen instruments will cause data to be left out of consideration. In addition to these absolute limits of objectivity surrounding the measurement process, any given community of researchers often shares certain "subjective views" and this subjectivity is therefore built into the conceptual systems; and it can even be built into the design of the tools used for measurement. Total objectivity is arguably not even possible in some—or maybe all—situations. (All data are theory-laden.)

2) Exhaustiveness: A good account should be based on a thorough-going observation of the facts it intends to explain. That is, all the related cases or categories under study are adequately covered and treated. The difficulty lies in the clear-cut definition of forms or categories as well as in the big enough amount of data observed. The computer can help in the

latter now.

3) Consistency: A consistent account of something is one that contains no self-contradiction; that is, the later statements should not go against the earlier statements and one's theoretical claims should cohere with one another. The definition of essential technical terms must be consistent, for instance. The theoretic stance must remain the same throughout.

4) Simplicity or economy: It means that other things being equal, the shorter the statement the better. If two descriptions or explanations serve the same function, the simpler one is preferred. A long list of items does not help much. The level of abstraction is important. Good generalizations are required. They contain insight and make things much simpler.

## 1.4 Differences Between Schools and Branches

Schools refer to trends of thought, with their representative figures, works, unique ideas, methods, and influence on later development, often from a diachronic perspective. Branches refer to areas of study, with their classics, and influential figures, often from a synchronic perspective.

### 1.4.1 Branches of Linguistics

Distinction from within: phonetics, phonology, lexicology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics.

Distinction from outside language: psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, neurolinguistics, anthropological linguistics, cultural linguistics, computational linguistics, etc.

### 1.4.2 Schools of Linguistics

Traditional grammar (600 BC–18th century);

Historical linguistics (19th century to early 20th century);

Beginning of modern linguistics (early 20th century);

European functionalism (1920–1950);

The London School (1940–1950);

Halliday's systemic-functional grammar (1960–today);

American structuralism (1930–1950);

Chomsky's generative grammar (1957–today);

Cognitive linguistics (today).

## 1.5 Major Distinctions Between Language and Linguistics

1) Form and meaning (function): If you approach language from formal perspective, you will belong to a formal school; if you look at language from a functional point of view, you will belong to a functional school. They are the two most important aspects of language until recently—cognition comes into the picture.

2) Prescriptive, descriptive & explanatory: You are being prescriptive if telling people what language ought to be; you lay down rules for it. If you say language is whatever is spoken in the speech community, you are then being descriptive. You don't just describe what language is like but also try to explain why it is like that, then you are trying to be explanatory.

3) Synchronic and diachronic studies: Language exists in time and changes over time. If you study language at a particular point in time, that is synchronic linguistics. If you study language across time, that is, at several language states, then that is diachronic linguistics. But it is only logical that synchronic studies come before diachronic studies.

4) Psychological divide: behaviorist and mentalist psychology (later cognitive psychology). Behaviorism is the belief that the study of mind should only be based on people's behavior. Mentalism is the belief that a human being possesses a mind which has consciousness, ideas, etc., and that mind can influence the behavior of the body.

5) Philosophical divide: empiricism and rationalism. Empiricism is the belief that the development of theory must be related to observable facts and experiments or that all human knowledge comes from experience. It contrasts with the view that many forms of human knowledge are inborn or innate (innatist hypothesis, which says that knowledge develops from ideas in the mind at birth rather than from the environment).

### Questions for further studying

1. One of the main features of our human languages is arbitrariness. Can you briefly explain what this feature refers to? Support your argument with examples.
2. What is the difference between language and linguistics? Prescriptive and descriptive approaches to language? Synchronic and diachronic linguistics? Form and meaning? Empiricism and rationalism? Behaviorist and mentalist psychology?
3. Tell the differences between Schools and Branches according to modern linguistics.
4. How do you understand that language is a scientific system?
5. What are the design features of language?

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## Chapter 2 The Beginning of Modern Linguistics

### 2.1 A Brief Introduction to Saussure

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) was a Swiss linguist who occupies an important place in the history of linguistics. He was the pivotal figure in the transition from the 19th to 20th century, and is generally considered the founder of modern linguistics.

He was born in Geneva, on December 26, 1857, Switzerland. By age 15, he had learned Greek, French, German, English, and Latin. He began his education at the University of Geneva, studying physics and chemistry from 1875 to 1876. He went to Leipzig in 1876 to study linguistics.

Saussure published a book entitled *Dissertation on the Primitive Vowel System in Indo-European Languages* in 1878.

He wrote his doctoral thesis *On the Genitive Absolute in Sanskrit* in Berlin in 1879. He returned to Leipzig and was awarded his doctorate in 1880. He taught in Paris for 11 years (1881–1891) before returning to Geneva in 1891.

He lectured on Sanskrit and Indo-European at the University of Geneva from 1891 to 1907. Saussure began teaching the course of general linguistics in 1907 (1907–1911). He died in 1913 in Australia.

### 2.2 The Source of Saussure's Thought

The early history of linguistics can be traced back to thousands of years ago. However, modern linguistics did not begin until the end of the 18th century, and linguistics was not an academic discipline until the 19th century. It was because during that time, German universities had introduced the concept of a *university* dedicated to both research and teaching.

From 1876 to 1880, Saussure studied in Leipzig and Berlin,

