

INTERPRETATIONS OF
MICROLINGUISTIC THEORIES

微观语言学理论解析

赵海萍 著

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内 容 简 介

《微观语言学理论解析》一书比较系统地阐述并分析了微观语言学领域中各部门的基础理论,内容涵盖语音学、音系学、词汇学、句法学、语义学和语用学多项分支学科。在分析基础理论的同时,本书注重体现微观语言学研究中的新成果,如有关语义学和语用学等方面的新理论。

本书共分6章,第1章为导论,第2~6章分别介绍语音学与音系学、词汇学、句法学、语义学和语用学。本书可作为英语专业高年级学生、报考英语专业研究生人员的参考书,也可供对微观语言学感兴趣的读者参考。

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前 言

自 20 世纪 50 年代末开始，西方国家在语言学领域新说纷出，建树颇多，其影响遍及心理学、社会学、教育学、人类学等学科，从此各大高校相继开设语言学课程，培养专业人才。自 1980 年以来，国内已有高校在英语专业开设以英语讲授的各种语言学课程，最普遍的首推“普通语言学”和“语言学导论”。时代的变化对英语专业的教学提出了新的要求，原有的语言学课程已经难以满足英语专业毕业生的需求，他们需要更深入的学习以应对就业和考研两大压力。正是在这一背景下，笔者开始了《微观语言学理论解析》的撰写工作。本书的撰写遵循如下原则：

1. 以英语专业高年级学生为主要对象，也可供英语专业的研究生使用；
2. 用英语撰写，力求语言逻辑有序，便于学生在学习微观语言学的同时提高用英语进行学术思维的能力；
3. 在内容上，既要传授基本知识，也要反映微观语言学的最新进展；
4. 在观点上，不拘泥于一派之说；
5. 重点概念和定义部分用黑体加以强调，旨在服务读者复习；
6. 每章后均附有各大高校历年的相关考研真题，考虑到相当一部分英语专业的毕业生会进一步攻读硕士学位，这部分练习对他们会有帮助。

本书曾得到众多专家同行的指导和帮助。在撰写过程中，太原理工大学的赵安源教授和郝玫教授，陕西科技大学的方小容教授，太原科技大学的刘晓虹教授、董艳教授，崔艳英和雷海燕老师，均给予过热情鼓励并提出宝贵意见。在此表示深深的谢意，希望能够

一直得到他们的指导和帮助。

由于水平有限，本书在内容和撰写上未必能尽如人意，不当之处，恳切期望专家同行和读者惠予批评指正。

著 者

2009 年 3 月

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Chapter 1 From Language to Linguistics

A mentioning of the topic language will bring about two extreme reactions; some may think language is such an integrated part of our life that it is not a worthy subject for academic study, but others might be overwhelmed by the endless list of questions it evokes, like do animals have language; what are those gestures we use in our daily communications, are they languages; how to decide the status of those artificial languages mathematics and computer science use, do they fall into the category of our studying here... To answer the first group of people, we say it is just because language is such an ordinary thing that we need to have a more thorough understanding of it; as to those who worry too much, we have to tell that those who study language have actually more worries because the study of language is actually a science-linguistics.

1.1 Definition of language

As we said above, language seems to be such a common thing that everyone dares to express their views about it. The following are some fundamental views about language, which you may instinctively agree without having thought about the reasons.

1. Children learn their native language swiftly, efficiently and without instruction.
2. Language operates by rules.
3. All languages have three major components: a sound system, a

system of lexicogrammar and a system of semantics.

4. Everyone speaks a dialect.

5. Language slowly changes.

6. Speakers of all languages employ a range of styles and a set of jargons.

7. Languages are intimately related to the societies and individuals that use them.

8. Writing is derivative of speech.

They are, of course, by no means definition of language since none of them points out the real nature of language. Instead, some of them are regarded as myths, for example:

Myth 1. Language is a means of communication.

Myth 2. Language has a form-meaning correspondence.

Myth 3. The function of language is to exchange information.

Myth 4. English is more difficult to learn than Chinese.

Myth 5. Black English is not standard and should be reformed.

...

The list of myths may go on and by the end of this course if you look back on them, we hope you may find these widely established views not so truthful after all.

Modern linguists have proposed various definitions of language, some of them are:

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

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

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

Each of these definitions has its own special emphasis, and is not totally free from limitations. However, there are some important characteristics of human language linguists have all agreed on, which are embraced in the following generally accepted definition: **Language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication.**

Language must be a system. Since elements in it are arranged according to certain rules, they can not be combined at will. If language were not systematic, it could not be learned or used consistently. Language is arbitrary in the sense that there is no intrinsic connection between the word “pen” and the thing we use to write with. The fact that different languages have different words for it (钢笔 in Chinese for instance) speaks strongly for the arbitrary nature of language. This also explains the symbolic nature of language; words are associated with objects, actions, ideas by convention. We say language is vocal because the primary medium is sound for all languages. No matter how well developed their writing systems are, all evidence shows that writing systems came much later than the spoken forms and that they are only attempts to capture sounds and meaning on paper. The term “human” in the definition is meant to specify that language is human-specific; that is, it is very different from the communication systems other forms of life possess.

1.2 Origin of language

In this part we will be focusing on how language as a system originated rather than how certain specific language in the world developed. The former deals with questions such as when, where, how and why human beings started to have language in the remote history or prehistory of mankind. These are also known as phylogenetic questions. The latter deals with how individual languages develop, evolve and change over time and how different languages are related to and divergent from each other in terms of language families.

The word “origin” has more than one definition. It can mean causes, sources and beginning. These three different understandings of it have led scholars into different directions in their search of origins of language. In this book, we will only explore one perspective—origin understood as source.

The various theories concerning the source of language roughly fall into two opposing schools of thoughts; creationism and evolutionism. The former takes the view that language is created and given to human beings by some external or internal sources, whereas the latter views language as a result of gradual evolution in the process of human evolution. This is also known as Darwinist Evolution Theory.

1.2.1 The divine origin theory

The most representative and popular of the various theories of creationism is the divine origin theory. Since language is one of the greatest muscles of human beings and since it is so complex, some people think that human could never have invented language by themselves. Therefore, it must have descended from some wise external source.

For example, Chapter One of the Book of John in the New Testament says: “in the beginning was the Word, and Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . ” Some theologists believe that this gives the evidence that language is created by God. Another piece of Biblical evidence comes from Genesis, Chapter Three, which says, “and then He (God) brought all animal to Adam to be named; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was his name, the man gave names to all the cattle, and to every bird of the air, and to every beast of the field. ” This was taken as another piece of evidence that God instructed Adam, the original parent, whose first words were names.

But how can the fact be explained that there are so many different languages in the world? For this, the Biblical account is the story of the Tower of Babel. In his story, the confusion of languages preceded the

dispersion of peoples.

Now the whole earth had one language and few words. And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly" and they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." And the LORD came down to see the city and tower, which the sons of men had built, and the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they oppose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, they may not understand one another's speech." So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. (from Revised Standard Version of the Bible)

We might just as well point out the divine origin theory is in line with the idea of the Great Chain of Being. As Lieberman (1975) puts it, "if man was of divine origin, language was too." However, the divine origin theory was severely challenged by later scholars, the greatest challenge came from the archaeological discovery that humans have existed on the earth much longer than 6,000 years, long before the Bible was written. Nowadays, most scholars had rejected the divine origin theory of language.

1.2.2 The inner spirit theory

Some scholars believe that a spirit resides within human beings. This spirit is the source of the first words. Wilhelm von Humboldt, a German philosopher from the early 1800s, saw language as "something directly given" and governed from the inside by "inner linguistic sense". With the

help of this inner sense, “man spins language out of himself” by a process of “fate”. Thinking along the same line was Friedrich Nietzsche, who said that the inner spirit is “instinct” and the innermost “kernel” of one’s being which is inherited.

According to this inner spirit theory, language originated in two stages. At the first stage, the inner spirit made outcries from feelings or emotions such as pleasure or pain. However, at this stage the sounds had no meaning and could not be repeated by intention. But over time a sound came to be associated with a particular experience, like “ouoo” with hurt. Eventually, that sound came to symbolize, or stand for, that experience in speakers’ and listeners’ minds. This is the second stage, the growth of meaning.

The inner spirit theory became known as the Whistle-and-grunt theory, the Ouch-ouch theory or the Pooh-pooh theory. Chomsky’s theory of language innateness in fact resembles this school of thought. It also believes that human beings have the innate capacity of symbolizing their experiences. This capacity is taken as the dividing line between animals and human beings.

1.2.3 The nature theory

This theory holds that the origin and structure of language have the bases in nature. Language exists in nature in much the same way that gravity is a law of nature. Scholars who hold this theory believe that language, as an *inherent* part of nature, is there for human to discover.

To start with, humans imitated the sounds of nature, in the 1860s, a German philosopher, Gottfried Heinrich von Schubert, claimed that language originated when human “sang along with the melody of the stars and planets”. Other scholars spoke about human imitating the sound of animals and of rain and thunder. For example, a primitive person might have said “whoosh” in response to wind, “boom” to thunder, “potter-patter” to rain, “honk” to geese, and “cuckoo” to a songbird.