

# ENGLISH

# 英语语言学概论

AN INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH LINGUISTICS

▶ 李郁 高阳 周澍 / 编著

东北师范大学出版社

Northeast Normal University Press

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- 策 划：教材分社  
 责任编辑：魏 昆  
 封面设计：宋 超  
 责任校对：王宏志  
 责任印制：张允豪

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**图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据**

英语语言学概论/李郁, 高阳, 周澍编著. 长春:  
东北师范大学出版社, 2007.10

ISBN 978 - 7 - 5602 - 5089 - 2

I. 英… II. ①李…②高…③周… III. 英语 — 语  
言学 — 概论 — 高等学校 — 教材 IV. H31

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2007) 第 168452 号

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东北师范大学出版社出版发行  
长春市人民大街 5268 号 (130024)  
电话: 0431—85687213 85691263  
传真: 0431—85691969

网址: <http://www.nenup.com>

电子函件: [sdcbs@mail.jl.cn](mailto:sdcbs@mail.jl.cn)

东北师范大学出版社激光照排中心制版

吉林农业大学印刷厂印装  
长春市新城大街 2888 号 (130118)

2007 年 12 月第 1 版 2007 年 12 月第 1 次印刷

幅面尺寸: 185 mm×260 mm 印张: 18.5 字数: 430 千

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**定价: 30.00 元**

如发现印装质量问题, 影响阅读, 可直接与承印厂联系调换

## 前 言

《高等学校英语专业教学大纲》明确地把英语语言学列入高等院校英语专业必须开设的专业知识课程之一。这门课程对于提高英语专业学生的英文修养及专业水平至关重要。随着英语专业学生人数的不断增加,越来越多的本科生有想继续攻读硕士的愿望,而语言学的内容也属于必考的范围。我国一些著名学者编写和出版了几种语言学教材,但针对本科生来说,这些教材有的过于偏重理论,有的过于晦涩难懂。其中大部分教材都用英文编写,内容多,知识点分散,学生接触、掌握、吸收起来比较困难。为了满足广大学生要扩大自己知识面及认识深度的需求,使其能系统地掌握语言学知识,我们特编写了这本《英语语言学概论》。

本书汲取了语言学重要的研究成果,以国内高等学校的英语专业本科生为教授对象,内容针对性强,按照简化学习程序,特别是将知识点提炼出来,结合其他同类教材进行综合、整理的原则,利用联想的方式加深理解记忆,帮助学生更容易、系统地了解语言学知识。书后提供了语言学主要术语英汉和汉英对照表及参考书目,以方便读者在阅读教材或其他语言学著作碰到生词时翻阅查找。因此,本书具有很强的可操作性。

全书共分两部分。第一部分有十二章,既包括传统的内容:如语音学,音位学,形态学,语义学,语用学,语言与社会和文化,又对一些新兴的学科作了扼要的介绍,如语言习得、语篇分析等。为了方便读者学习,在每节后配有练习题。第二部分内容与第一部分各章相对应,除用汉语给出本章的概述外,还针对学习内容进行了要点分析,并配有课后练习题答案。这样编排有利于学生对语言学知识了解得更加透彻。

本书第一、三、五、七、九章由高阳完成,第二、四、六、八章由李郁完成,第十、十一和十二章由周澍完成,最终由李郁定稿。由于编者水平有限,书中难免有不妥之处,恳请读者不吝赐教,便于以后修订提高。

编 者

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## Chapter One Introduction

### 1.1 What is language?

It is language that makes us human. It is the distinctive characteristic that separates the human from all other species, even from the other great apes. Language, which we cannot be more familiar with, may refer to various senses. It may mean what a person said or says, a particular variety or style, or the components within a language.

Then, what is language, and how does it differ from other forms of communication? There does not have a universally accepted definition of language, or criteria for its use. Language consists of various aspects that people believe are more or less important, such as, grammar, symbol usage, the ability to represent real world situations, and the ability to articulate something new. Nevertheless, Linguists have not reached an agreement on how to define language. Consider the following two definitions:

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

“Language is human vocal noise or the graphic representation of this noise in written used systematically and conventionally by a community for purposes of communication.” (David Crystal 1989)

Both definitions refer to the element of system and both allude to the fact that the association between the words used and the things that they denote is not inherent, Sapir by using the word symbols and Crystal by referring to the fact that the association is the result of convention. Crystal, in referring to the vocal noise, is more specific about the principal way in which the message is physically transmitted.

These definitions, though different, are based on the same assumption that only human beings have language. To give the barest of definition, language is a means of verbal communication. It is instrumental in that communicating by speaking or writing is a purposeful act. It is social and conventional in that language is a social semiotic and communication can only take place effectively if all the users share a broad understanding of human interaction.

Many linguists hold that human language is specific (unique). A question that has been pursued is: what properties make human language unique?

### 1.2 Design features of language

Design features refer to the defining properties of human language that distinguish it from any animal system of communication. By comparing language with animal

communication systems, we can have a better understanding of the nature of language. A framework was proposed by the American Linguist Charles Hockett. He specified twelve design features, five of which will be discussed here.

### 1. 2. 1 Arbitrariness

The widely accepted meaning of this feature which was discussed by Saussure, first refers to the fact that the forms of linguistic signs bear no natural relationship to their meaning. A good example is the fact that different sounds are used to refer to the same object in different languages.

This also explains the symbolic nature of language words are just symbols; they are associated with objects, actions, ideas, etc, by convention. This 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". However, we should also aware that language is not entirely arbitrary, certain words are motivated. The best examples are the onomatopoeic words, such as rumble, crash, cackle, and bang in English. Besides, some compound words are also not entirely arbitrary, e. g. while "photo" and "copy" are both arbitrary. But the compound word "photocopy" is not entirely arbitrary.

Arbitrariness of language makes it potentially creative, and conventionality of language makes learning language laborious. For learners of a foreign language, it is the conventionality of a language that is more worth noticing than its arbitrariness.

### 1. 2. 2 Duality

"By duality is meant the property of having two levels of structures, such that units of the primary level are composed of elements of the secondary level and each of the two levels has its own principles of organization." (Lyons 1982: 20)

At the low (secondary) level there is a structure of sounds which are meaningless. But the sounds of language can be grouped and regrouped into a large number of units of meaning such as morphemes and words, which are found at the high level of the system. In the lines of Keats, "The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves" for example, there is a repetition of sounds which are associated with the letter "s". One of these sounds is voiced in the words flies and eves, and the other unvoiced as in summer. The same distinction corresponds to spelling differences in the case of "v" (voiced as in eves) and "f" (unvoiced as in flies). These distinctions are part of the sound system of English. But the sounds don't themselves have meaning. What they do is to combine in all manners of ways to form words which are meaningful. So although we can attribute no meaning to the sounds/s/ and /z/ or /f/ and /v/as such, they serve to make up words which are different in meaning, as for example;

face/feis/& phase/feis/;

safe /sɛif/ & save /seiv/.

Obviously this duality provides language with productive power; a relative small number of elements at one level can enter into thousands of different combinations to form units of meaning at the other level.

Many animals communicate with special calls, which have corresponding meanings. That is, the primary units have meanings but cannot be further divided into elements. So we say animal communication systems do not have this design feature of human language. The property of duality, consequently, the communicative power of animal language is highly limited.

### 1.2.3 Creativity (Productivity)

Language is creative in the sense that users can understand and produce sentences they have never heard before. If I say "A three-eyed white monkey is sleeping soundly on bed of the king of France" none of those who have heard it would have any difficulty understanding it, though it is remotely possible that anyone could have heard it before.

Creativity is unique to human language. Most animal communication systems appear to be highly restricted with respect to the number of different signals that their users can send and receive.

The creativity of language partly originates from its duality which we just discussed in the above section, namely, because of duality the speaker is able to combine the basic linguistic units to form an infinite set of sentences, most of which are never before produced or heard.

Language is creative in another sense, that is, its potential to create endless sentences. The recursive nature of language provides a theoretical basis for this possibility. For instance, we can write a sentence like the following and go on endlessly:

"This is the farmer sowing the corn that kept the cock that crowed in the morn that waked the priest all shaven and shorn that married the man all tattered and torn that kissed the maiden all for torn that milked the cow with the crumpled horn that tossed the dog that worried the cat that killed the rat that ate the malt that ..."

### 1.2.4 Displacement

Displacement means that language can be used to refer to things which are present or not present, real or imagined in the past, present or future or in far-away places (time place). Thus, I can refer to Confucius, or the North Pole, even though the first has been died for over 4000 years and the second is situated far away from us.

In contrast, no animal communication system possesses this feature. Animal calls are mainly uttered in response to immediate changes of situation, i. e. in contact of food, in presence of danger, or in pain. Once the danger or pain is gone, call stops.

### 1.2.5 Cultural Transmission

While human capacity for language has a genetic basis, i. e., we were all born with the ability to acquire language, the details of any language system are not genetically transmitted, but instead have to be taught and learned. An English speaker and a Chinese speaker are both able to use a language, but they are not mutually intelligible. This shows that language is culturally transmitted. It is passed on from one generation to the next through teaching and learning, rather than by instinct. In contrast, animal call systems are genetically transmitted, i. e., animals are born with the capacity to produce the set of calls peculiar to their species. That means language can transmit culture which the language contains.

### 1.3 Functions of language

The term “communication” can be used to cover most of the function of language. But the function of language is varied. I’ve got a knife could imply that it is now only necessary to find a fork before one can start eating or it could be a warning. Do you have a knife? It could be considered as an offer to lend a knife or a request to borrow one. If the person we are talking to has been ill, we probably want an honest answer to the question “How are you?”; if we ask it simply as part of a greeting we may not want an honest answer. Linguists have different terms for the different functions of language.

Linguists talk about the FUNCTIONS of language in an abstract sense. They summarize these practical functions and attempt some broad classifications of the basic functions of language like the following:

Jacobson, the Prague school structuralist, defined the six primary factors of any speech event, namely; speaker, addresser, context, message, code, contact. In conjunction with these, Jakobson establishes a well-known framework of language functions based on the six key elements of communication, namely; referential (to convey message and information), poetic (to indulge in language for its own sake), emotive (to express attitudes, feelings and emotions), conative (to persuade and influence others through commands), phatic (to establish communion with others) and metalingual function (to clear up intentions, words and meanings). They correspond to such communication elements as context, message, addresser, addressee, contact and code.

Halliday proposes a theory of metafunctions of language, that is, language has IDEATIONAL, INTERPERSONAL AND TEXTUAL functions. Ideational function constructs a model of experience and constructs logical relations. Interpersonal function enacts social relationships and textual function creates relevance to context.

In his earlier works, Halliday proposed seven categories of language function by observing child language development, i. e. instrumental, regulatory,



representational, interactional, personal, heuristic and imaginative. Still other classifications employ different categories and use different terms, but all share a lot in common about the basic functions of language.

#### 1.4 What is linguistics?

Having discussed about the design features and functions of language, the object of linguistics, we now come to the business itself—a brief discussion of what is linguistics and its status as a science. Linguistics is generally defined as the scientific study of language. The word “language” preceded by the zero articles in English implies that linguistics studies not any particular language, but language in general. The word study doesn’t mean “learn”, but “investigate” or “examine”. And the word “scientific” refers to the way in which it is studied. A scientific study of language based on the systematic investigation of data, conducted with reference to some general theory of language structure.

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.

In its operations and statements it is guided by four canons of science:

1. Exhaustiveness: The adequate treatment of all the relevant material.
2. Consistency: the absence of contradiction between different parts of the total statement; and, within the limits imposed by the two preceding principles.
3. Objectivity: being objective as possible in our description and analysis of data, allowing no prejudice to influence his generalization.
4. Economy: a shorter statement or analysis employing fewer terms is to be preferred to one that is longer or more involved.

#### 1.5 Scope of linguistics

Linguistics is a general term covering a wide range of various aspects of language and it’s difficult to define its boundaries in modern times when sciences are highly developed, because it is closely related with many of other sciences, such as psychology, philosophy, sociology, anthropology and computer science.

Language is not an isolated phenomenon, so it results in some interdisciplinary branches of linguistic study. In the study of the extralinguistic relationship with the outside world there are various branches of linguistics, which are rapidly developing in the modern world. Sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, applied linguistics, neurolinguistics, mathematical linguistics and pragmatics are only a few of them; they