



# 简明

# 英语语言学教程

苏立昌 编著

Linguistics: An Introduction

南开大学出版社

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# 前 言

继 20 世纪 80 年代我国普通高校陆续开设语言学概论课程以来，先后有多部适于不同需求的英语语言学教程问世。这些教程的出版，对介绍当今语言学的最新理论，普及语言学的基础知识，以及不断提高语言学概论课程的教学质量无疑起到了积极的推动作用。但是，我们在教材的使用过程中也发现，有些教材虽然涉及的面较宽，但理论介绍过于繁琐，学生掌握起来感到困难。而另外一些教材虽非常通俗易懂，但对本科高年级的学生来说又略显单薄，不够解渴。面临教学中的实际困难，我们试图在现有教材的基础之上，博采众家之长，避某些教材之短，编写出一部既能较好介绍语言学的核心理论，如语音、形态、句法、语义等基础理论，又能较全面介绍语言学相关知识的简明语言学教程。同时，我们还将重要的知识点编成强化训练题，对教材的部分内容加以补充，以便于学生学习和掌握教材中的关键内容，可以帮助学生课外学习。

该教材主要包括语言学基础理论和相关知识两个部分。语言学基础理论部分主要包括语音学、形态学、句法学、语义学、语用学和社会语言学等的介绍。其中，特别增加了介绍概念隐喻认知语言学基础理论的章节。

教材在编写过程中得到了南开大学教学改革项目的立项资助。教材编写过程中，杨建、郑蕴荣承担了文字的录入工作。教材的编写同时得到南开大学出版社的大力支持，特别是张彤、宋立君和邱静编辑

的大力协助。编者在此表示衷心的感谢!

尽管教材在编写形式上力图有所革新，但在内容和编写上一定仍存在不当之处，恳请专家、读者予以批评指正。

编者  
2008年12月

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# **Chapter 1    Invitations to Linguistics**

## **1.1    Why Study Linguistics?**

### **1.1.1    The Theoretical Importance**

Linguistics is generally known as a systematic and scientific study of language. By such a systematic study, we may resolve many linguistic puzzles that have been perplexing us all through the centuries. For example, by studying the design features of language and language communication systems, we may explain how human language differs from any form of animal communication. In the study of linguistics, we'll answer the questions such as "What is language?", "How does language work?", "What do all languages have in common?", "What range of variation is found among languages?", "How does a child acquire his mother tongue?" etc.

We have to admit that our knowledge of our language is still at a preliminary stage, and many aspects of our language are still unknown to us and not adequately explained. In many respects we are ignorant of systems and principles of the languages we speak. It is a common phenomenon that one may speak a language well, but know nothing about the basic working principles of the language he speaks. Nor does he know anything about the way to define his own language. And one may easily find differences and similarities between his language and other related

and exotic languages (Eastern or Western), but not be able to provide adequate explanations. Even when facing the dialects spoken by people of various regions, social and age groups, one is perhaps not ready and adequate enough to give proper explanations for the language phenomenon, nor does he understand the implications that lie behind it. Very often, one can easily find the difference between human language and animal communications, but not be able to explain the phenomenon in theoretical terms. Nor is he able to tell how human beings acquire their languages even though he notices the obvious differences between human language acquisition and the development of any animal communication systems.

To look at human language even further, our knowledge of the relationship between our human brain and the meaning we convey in the form of language still remains a mystery, and it elicits the endeavor of many linguists and natural scientists to search for a better explanation.

Our linguistic study is, therefore, to answer the many questions such as those raised above and to seek for adequate explanations for each of these linguistic puzzles.

### **1.1.2 The Practical Importance**

By studying linguistics, we know more about the nature and principles of the language we speak, and can deal with many problems relating to our language. For example, with our linguistic knowledge we can describe and help recover or rescue the languages that are on the verge of distinction, thus leaving a record of these precious languages, such as the early work done by American linguists in the early 20th century.

Linguistic studies are already being applied to the practical problems of automatic and machine translation and the exploitation of statistic techniques connected with language. Our knowledge of the basic composition of the language signals helps the communication engineers to



understand and build transmission and reception systems. Without the aid of the knowledge of language, the study of artificial intelligence and machine translation will be impossible.

In medicine, linguistic knowledge is a powerful aid in the remedial treatment known as speech therapy. The co-efforts of linguists and doctors help the patients with brain injury or defect to recover their language.

Linguistic research will be of great benefit to the science of teaching and learning. Our linguistic knowledge can help improve our teaching techniques and design better textbooks, and make our teaching and learning more effective.

Furthermore, an understanding of the power of language can help people mould opinions, disseminate views, and exert influence on other people, whether socially, politically or economically. This pragmatic study of language proves to be important in studying the implications found behind various kinds of texts in real communication.

“It is important to recognize the by-products that may come from linguistic studies; but linguists themselves need not engage in applied linguistics. Their subject is of sufficient interest and significance in the world to maintain itself in its own right” (Akmajian, 2001). The job of a linguist is to make “human beings more aware of one essential aspect of their humanity, and present the fundamental insights about language to which every educated person should be exposed” (ibid).

## 1.2 The Scope of Linguistics

The study of language as a whole is what we call **general linguistics** which deals with the basic concepts, theories, descriptions, models and methods applicable in any linguistic study. It contrasts to those branches of study which relate linguistics to the research of other areas. There are five core areas or main branches of linguistics, namely, phonetics, phonology,

morphology, syntax and semantics.

### **1.2.1 Phonetics**

Phonetics refers to the study of the nature, production, and perception of speech sounds. It studies how speech sounds are made, transmitted and received, the description and classification of speech sounds.

### **1.2.2 Phonology**

Phonology, different from phonetics, is the study of the sound systems of individual languages and of the nature of such systems generally. In other words, it studies the rules governing the structure, distribution, and sequencing of speech sounds and shape of syllables.

### **1.2.3 Morphology**

Morphology is concerned with the internal organization of words. It studies the minimal units of meaning—morphemes and word formation rules.

### **1.2.4 Syntax**

Syntax is the study of grammatical relations between words and other units within the sentence. It studies the rules that govern the formation of sentence, i.e. how words are arranged in a sentence and in what order.

### **1.2.5 Semantics**

Semantics refers to the study of meaning of language. It is not only concerned with meanings of words, but also with meanings of morphemes and sentences.

### **1.2.6 Pragmatics**

Pragmatics is also concerned with the study of meaning. However,

instead of studying the meanings of words and sentences in isolation, it emphasizes the study of meaning in context. It deals with particular utterances in particular situations and is especially concerned with the various ways in which many social contexts of language performances can influence interpretation.

### **1.2.7 Sociolinguistics**

Sociolinguistics refers to the study of language in relation to society. It studies the correlations between linguistic variables (e.g. the precise phonetic quality of a vowel, or a presence or absence of a certain element in a construction) and non-linguistic variables such as social class of speakers, their gender, age, etc.

### **1.2.8 Psycholinguistics**

Psycholinguistics refers to the study of language in or from the viewpoint of psychology. The study is applied since the 1960s to two main fields: the empirical study of the development of language in children, and the investigation through experiments of the psychological mechanisms for the production and understanding of speech.

### **1.2.9 Cognitive Linguistics**

Cognitive linguistics is a new movement in linguistics since the late 1980s. It emphasizes the continuity of language with the workings of the mind in general and seeks to ground a theory of language in accounts of cognition. The study opposes especially to structuralist schools, including that of Chomsky, which stresses the autonomy of language.

Other fields of linguistic studies include anthropological linguistics, computer linguistics, etc.

## 1.3 Some Important Distinctions in Linguistics

### 1.3.1 Prescriptive vs. Descriptive

Prescriptive and descriptive refer to two different types of linguistic study. If a linguistic study describes and analyses the language people actually use, i.e. “discover and record the rules to which the members of a speech community actually conform” (Lyons, 1982: 47), it is said to be descriptive; if it aims to prescribe what is judged to be correct, i.e. to lay down the rules for “correct and standard” behavior, it is said to be prescriptive.

Modern linguistics is mostly descriptive. It is different from the earlier studies of language commonly known as “traditional grammar” in that the latter “tends to assume that written language is more fundamental than the spoken, and the particular form of written language, namely the literary language is inherently ‘purer’ and more ‘correct’ than other forms of language, written or spoken; and that it is the task of a grammarian to ‘preserve’ this form of the language from ‘corruption’” (Lyons, 1977: 42). In other words, any forms of English that are not in conformity with the so called standard patterns or uses of English, such as a regional dialect of English and the African American English, etc., are regarded as “incorrect.” This is certainly not true in modern linguistic study, as it is generally known that “each socially and regionally differentiated form of the language has its own standard of ‘purity’ and ‘correctness’. Once this is realized and accepted, the way is clear to a more satisfactory description of languages. The linguist’s task is to describe the way people actually speak their language, not to prescribe how they ought to speak or write” (ibid).

### **1.3.2 Synchronic vs. Diachronic**

Synchronic means “at some ‘point’ in time.” By the synchronic study of a language is meant the description of a particular “state” of that language, and an account of its structure either at present or at some specific moment in the past, considered in abstraction from its history. Diachronic, on the other hand, refers to “having to do with changes over time.” By the diachronic study of a language is meant the description of its historical development “through time.” For example, a diachronic study of English may deal with its historical development from the time of our earliest records to the present day, or over a period of time, i.e. the changes of English from the 15th century to the 19th century.

The linguistic study of the 19th century was primarily concerned with the diachronic, whereas the 20th-century linguistic theory gives more priority to synchronic and most present-day linguistic studies are synchronic.

### **1.3.3 Langue and Parole**

The distinction between langue and parole was made by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure in the early 20th century. The distinction is intended to eliminate an ambiguity in the use of the word “language” which consists of basically two parts, i.e. utterances and sentences. Langue refers to the linguistic competence of the speaker, i.e. the abstract linguistic systems shared by all members of a speech community, and parole refers to the phenomena or data of linguistics (utterances), i.e. the realization of language in use. Langue is abstract while parole is concrete.

Saussure made the distinction in order to emphasize the importance of the formal aspect of language for serious study. According to him, parole is simply a mass of linguistic data or facts that are too varied or confusing for systematic investigation, and what linguists should do is to

abstract langue from parole, i.e. to discover the regularities governing the actual use of language and make them the subjects of study of linguistics.

### **1.3.4 Competence and Performance**

The distinction between competence and performance was made by N. Chomsky in his *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. Competence refers to a language user's underlying knowledge about the system of rules, i.e. the fluent native speaker's tacit knowledge of his language, and performance refers to the actual use of language in concrete situations, i.e. what people actually say or understand by what someone else says on a given occasion. Chomsky's *competence* and *performance* distinction seems to relate to the *langue* and *parole* distinction of Saussure. However, there is a clear distinction between the two. Chomsky does not accept the view of seeing language as a mere systematic inventory of items. For him, competence is closer to the famous German linguist Humboldt's conception, i.e. it should refer to the underlying competence as a generative process.

"In the terminology adopted by Noam Chomsky, we are studying language as a cognitive system internalized within the human brain/mind; our ultimate goal is to characterize the internalized linguistic system (or I-language, as Chomsky terms it) which enables humans to speak and understand their native language. It seems reasonable to suppose that competence will play an important part in the study of performance, since you have to understand what native speakers tacitly know about their language before you can study the effects of tiredness, drunkenness, etc. on this knowledge." (Radford, 1977: 2-3)

## **1.4 What is Language?**

To give a clear-cut definition to the word "language" seems to be difficult, as the term has been used by people to refer to various senses.

Some people tend to define the word in terms of its system, i.e. “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,” therefore, “language is a set of rules.” While others define the word according to its functions, i.e. the ability to communicate by this means; thus, “language is a tool for human communication.”

But among the many senses that people use, two senses seem to be obvious, i.e. (1) language in the ordinary sense: e.g. English or Chinese, opposite to dialect; and (2) the phenomenon of vocal and written system among human beings generally. Thus the subject matter of linguistics includes both language as a general property of our species (sense (2)) and particular languages (sense (1)).

“A ‘language’ in sense (1) is defined more precisely in different ways according to different theories. For some it is a language system underlying the speech of community, thus especially a language as defined by Saussure. Alternatively, it is a system in the minds of an individual, thus especially I-language as defined by Chomsky in the mid-1980s. Others have conceived it as a set of sentences potentially observable in a speech community, thus especially a definition by Bloomfield in the 1920s. Alternatively, it is the set of sentences characterized or to be characterized by a generative grammar, thus Chomsky in the 1950s. (Oxford Concise Dictionary of Linguistics, 1997)

Here are a few definitions given by some well known linguists:

“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 “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 agreed on; these are embraced in the following generally accepted definition (Dai, 2002): **Language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication.**

## 1.5 Design Features of Language

We generally agree that language is unique to human beings but we may sometimes find it hard to specify what makes our language advantageous over animal “languages.” The American linguist Charles Hockett in his theoretical framework tried to define this difference in terms of design features, i.e. a number of defining properties that distinguish human language from any animal system of communication. The following are a few most discussed ones.

### 1.5.1 Arbitrariness

Arbitrariness means that there is no logical connection between linguistic form and its corresponding meaning. There is no connection between the sound of word *tree* and the concept “tree.” Likewise, there is no connection between a red light and the notion “stop-danger.” The relationship in this case is a cultural matter that developed by pure chance (Fromkin, 1974: 178). A good example is the fact that different sounds are used to refer to the same object in different languages. For instance, we cannot explain why a book is called a /buk/ in English, but *shu* in Chinese.

Though in all human languages the relationship between the sounds



and meanings of the overwhelming majority of words or morphemes is arbitrary by nature, we have to be aware that it is not entirely arbitrary. Certain words in our language are motivated. For example, the onomatopoeic words such as *rumble*, *crash*, *crackle*, and *bang* in English and *ping-pang* (乒乓), *dong-dong* (咚咚) and *di-da* (滴答) in Chinese are the imitations of the sounds we utter or produce. Also, some compound words are also not arbitrary. For instance, “sun” and “glass” are both arbitrary, whereas, the compound word “sunglass” is not. However, non-arbitrary words compose only a small percentage of the vocabulary in a language.

The arbitrary nature of language does not reflect on the level of morphemes and words alone. On the level of sentences a similar kind of arbitrariness can be found between the forms (or structure) and the meanings of the sentences. In the following sentences, though both sentences contain the same words, the meanings of them vary dramatically. In one, it is the cat that performs the action of chasing, while in the other, the mouse does. The difference of meaning is caused not by the meaning of the words, but by the difference of the structures of the two sentences, i.e.

(a) *The cat chases the mouse.*

(b) *The mouse chases the cat.*

The arbitrary nature of language makes it possible for language to have an unlimited source of expressions.

### 1.5.2 Duality

Duality refers to “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). In all languages investigated so far, one finds these two levels of structure, namely, the higher level, i.e. the