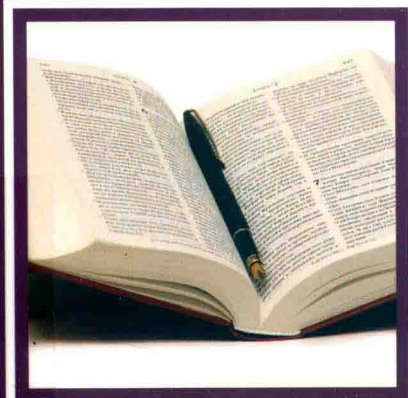


# Notes on General Linguistics

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## (普通语言学讲义)

朱岚晖 著



 吉林大学 出版社

Notes on General Linguistics

# 普通语言学讲义

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# 前言

编写这本普通语言学讲义的动力源于教学过程中的一个现象：虽然目前市面上语言学类的专著及教材非常多，但是这些专著和教材对于刚刚入门的学生来说却是晦涩难懂。另外，学生们接触的语言学专著和教材，所列举的例子都是出自英语。这则会给中国本科生一个感觉就是语言学离自己很远、离汉语很远，进而会让学生们觉得这门学科的学习其实除了为拿学分之外别无它用。

以上这些对语言学的误解并不能仅以学分压制和老师震慑来消除，而是需要把语言学知识与受众的关系拉近。这里的受众则是以英语为专业的、在语言学方面是零基础的中国本科生。因此，在这本薄薄的小册子中，所有的示例全部以中文的例子为主。除此之外，这些例子就是来自我们日常生活中所使用的鲜活言语。例如，在 pragmatics（语用学）那一章，对会话原则（cooperative principle）的解释及如何运用会话原则就是以发生在我本人生活中的一段对话为例的。通过这种方式，我们可以让学生看到语言学不仅不枯燥而且离我们很近。同时让学生理解到，正是因为语言离我们太近了，所以习焉不察极易忽略它的美。编写这本小册子的最终目的是通过对语言学入门级知识的介绍，可以帮助学生慢慢建立起对语言的敏感性进而体会语言的美。

随着社会的进步和人类的发展，对于高层次人才的需求会只增不

减。外语类专业学生们也不例外地意识到了这一点。那么，本科阶段掌握好的语言学基础知识，培养起的语言学兴趣，建立起的日常真实对话的敏感性将有助于学生们日后在硕士甚至博士阶段的科学研究。

除此之外，本书还致力于让学生们接触到语言学的理论前沿知识。为了达到这个目的，本书会介绍一些其他教材中未曾提及的知识点。例如，在语言与文化这一章，本人会增加 Cultural Linguistics 文化语言学这门新兴的语言学交叉学科的一个简单介绍。Cultural Linguistics 这门新兴学科由澳大利亚莫纳什大学的 Farzad Sharifian 教授创立。本人在读博期间非常幸运地聆听过 Sharifian 教授在马来西亚马来亚大学语言学系的讲座。更为幸运的是在转年去马来西亚槟城参加学术会议时，本人有幸再次见到 Sharifian 教授并与其进行过一些文化与语言的交流。之后，Sharifian 教授回到澳大利亚后特意将其 2005 年出版的 *Cultural Linguistics* 的独著寄给我留作纪念。对于这部分的语言学知识，我觉得作为一位语言学方向的学者，以及作为一位教授语言学知识的教师，我有义务也有必要传授给我的学生们。

在撰写本书之始，该用中文还是英文来写作，本人颇费了一番斟酌。考虑到本书的受众是英语专业的本科生，且采用全英文授课，因此最终还是决定用英文来完成写作，这样既可以还原本人上课与学生的交流与互动，同时也更能契合我的标题——Notes on General Linguistics。

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## Chapter 1

# Notes on General Linguistics

Linguistics, to me, a new researcher in this field, is fascinating and interesting. But some students, especially new beginners who start to hear the term “linguistics”, probably would think linguistics boring, difficult and useless. My assumptions on this phenomenon are:

1. The term “linguistics” is “语言学” in Chinese. The moment when new beginners, such as English majors in universities in China, hear the term “语言学”, another term “grammar” will immediately pop into their heads. In other words, the sense of “linguistics” is narrowed down as “grammar”. Consequently, new beginners may automatically assume that “linguistics” is only about “grammar”. Grammar, of course, is boring.

2. Then why is grammar boring? Because grammar is about nothing but rules, mainly the grammatical rules in the English language. Those rules have been taught and learned since the day that students started to study English. Undoubtedly, there exist some complicated rules in English, especially the rules which is so different from those in students’ mother tongue, namely Chinese. These complicated rules were taught over and over again. Students have learned those rules over and over again. Nevertheless, those rules still did not make any sense. This repeated issue on these complicated grammatical rules gives students boring and hard feelings.

There are two reasons for the impression of the uselessness of grammar. One reason is that students could give up the complicated English grammatical rules by escaping from them. For example, students could always choose the familiar constructions to express themselves. Consequently, there is no need to bother to learn the difficult and unfamiliar ones. Another reason is that since there is no need to learn the English grammatical rules, it seems like that there is no point to study Chinese grammatical rules either. Students may think that they have never learned Chinese grammatical rules systematically but they can still speak Chinese very well, so why bother?

3. Base on the three assumptions above, I would love to provide some of my comments here. First, the discussion of grammatical rules is a part of the entire linguistic field. It is mainly in the study of syntax. In other words, there are other various aspects of languages focused on in linguistics, such as the sound of a language, the meaning of a language, and the function of a language. Second, there is no doubt that some points on some grammatical rules are not easy to get, especially to non-native speakers and second language learners. But this is not the reason for claiming that grammatical rules are useless. We must notice that there are so many distinguished linguists and grammarians in the world who

have devoted their entire life to grammatical studies, such as Chomsky and his Transformational-Generative Grammar, Halliday and his Systemic Functional Linguistics, Fillmore and his Case Grammar, and Chao Yuanren, Wang Li, Lv Shuxiang and Zhu Dexi who were specialized in the Chinese language.

Therefore, it is not right to blame our own failure on grammar. It is also not healthy to think linguistics useless and boring just because grammar is useless and boring. If we give us a chance to embark on this journey of study linguistics, we will see how amazing linguistics is. So in the following section, let's get some ideas of what linguistics studies.

## 1.1 Branches in Linguistics

Since linguistics is a field of studying languages, the importance of the definition of language cannot be denied. But instead of discussing the definition, I personally prefer to consider the branches in linguistics first.

When we are in a class, a teacher and his/her fellow students convey and receive messages by talking to each other. The medium through which messages can be conveyed and received is the sound. Studies of sounds in human languages are Phonetics and Phonology. The difference

between Phonetics and Phonology can be simply put as that Phonetics studies individual sound in human languages, while Phonology studies the combination of the individual sound.

After individual sounds are combined together and represented by letters, it then can be manifested as different words. The study of words is called Lexicology. The form of words may be changed in some languages, such as English. The study of the changes in the form of words is Morphology. Of course, not every human language would undergo changes in the form of words, such as the Chinese language. One of the reasons that words undergo formal changes is due to the need for grouping words into sentences according to the grammatical rules in a certain language. The study of grammatical rules in linguistics is called Syntax.

Then we would ask if not every language has morphological changes, such as Chinese, whether this kind of language has grammatical rules and based on what this kind of language could group words into sentences. The answer to this question is yes, this kind of language has grammatical rules because this kind of language could resort to other ways to realize sentences, such as agreement, case, and word order. Clearly, there is no morphological inflection, agreement, and case in Chinese. But the Chinese language has word order. In other words, word order is the

way for the Chinese language users to group words into grammatically correct sentences. The word order of Chinese is SVO (Chao, 1968, 2004; Halliday, 2008). This point was also agreed upon by many other scholars, such as McDonald (1992), Halliday and Matthiessen (1999), and Yang (2015).

Now I have written/spoken 864 words. Boldly speaking, no one could memorize the exact words above. Neither did I. But this neither means that I have been talking/writing nonsense nor means that listeners/readers did not pay attention. This only shows that when we use language to communicate and to convey messages, it is the meaning construed in sentences/utterances that we understand and recall. The studies of meanings in linguistics are Semantics and Pragmatics. The difference between these two branches is that in Pragmatics, human beings and context are involved. This probably makes Pragmatics more interesting (at least to some scholars) and more complicated at the same time.

In addition to the branches discussed above which are “within” the scope of language, there are other branches in linguistics which emerged from the relationship between language and other fields, such as society, psychology, computer, culture and learning a language as a first/second/foreign language. Therefore, there exist sociolinguistics,

psycholinguistics, corpus linguistics, cultural linguistics, and first/second/foreign language acquisition.

## 1.2 Functions of Language

Many scholars have devoted themselves to categorizing functions of language. Functions of language can be broadly categorized as descriptive function, expressive function, and social function, while Russian linguist Roman Jakobson provided much detailed categorizations of functions of language, which are Emotive, Conative, Referential, Poetic, Phatic and Metalinguistic. As some of these functions can be understood directly from the terms, here I would like elaborate a little bit on the Phatic function and the Metalinguistic function.

Speaking the Phatic function of language, I personally prefer the interpretation provided by Professor Widdowson. Professor Widdowson metaphorically maintained that the phatic function of language is just like the situation when we meet a dog on the street, we would come to the dog and pat the dog on its head. It means nothing but to tell the dog that I have noticed you. Similarly, when we greet each other every day, for instance, this greeting, either being “How are you” in English or

being “你吃了吗 (ni chi le ma)” in Chinese, actually has no practical use because even if the answer to “你吃了吗 (ni chi le ma)” is “No, I did not”, this answer normally will not trigger the first utter to buy food for the second utter. Although the greeting does not have the practical use I said above, it exerts great influences on the social relationships among social members. The Phatic function could be regarded as the lubricant for the interpersonal relationships.

Now let's move from the Phatic function of language to the Metalinguistic function of language. The Metalinguistic function is an amazing function of language. Let's think about it. There are numerous various fields and studies in the world, such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, and aerodynamics among many others. All of these fields study something else other than language. But all of these fields use language to present their findings and to communicate with their readers. Linguistics is a study of languages. But only linguistics uses what it studies to study what it studies—language.

The six functions of language provided by Jakobson have been briefly discussed above. At the end of this section, I would love to recommend a novel entitled *The Seventh Function of Language* for us to read.



### 1.3 Design features of a language

The reason that I did not introduce the definition of language is that there might be controversy over the question that whether the sound made by animals can be called language. For example, if the sounds made by animals and the sound made by human beings are judged in terms of the function of communication, it will be reasonable to call the sound made by animals language. But if some other features are taken as the standard to define language, the sound made by animals probably cannot be called language, such as the nine design features proposed by Hockett. Five out of the nine design features are arbitrariness, productivity, duality, displacement, and cultural transmission.

When we see a wooden object that we can use to read, to write and to study, we call this thing “桌子 (zhuo zi)” in Mandarin, “desk” in English and “table” in French. All these three words refer to the same thing in reality and have the same meaning. But they are all different in terms of sounds. This example shows that “there is no logical connection between meanings and sounds” (Dai & He, 2018). This feature of language is called arbitrariness. Just because of the design feature of language—

arbitrariness, it became possible that there exist many different various languages in the world. Of course, there is an exception in language regarding the feature of arbitrariness. It is the onomatopoeic words, such as “汪汪 (wang wang)”, “嘎嘎 (ga ga)”, “喵喵 (miao)” in Chinese. But onomatopoeic words are in a very small percentage.

Another design feature of language is duality. It refers to the two systems in human languages. One system is sound. The other system is lexicogrammar, which helps group words in grammatically correct orders. All the sounds in a language can have numerous combinations to form various words. Various words then can be grouped together to realize limitless sentences based on the meaning that we want to convey. That is why Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) proposed that the human language system is “meaning potential”. Then I think it won't be hard to understand another design feature of productivity now.

The next design feature of language is displacement. Simply speaking, displacement here means “not right here, not right now”. In other words, we can use language to talk about the future, to discuss something happened who knows how long time ago, to describe some new discovery on the moon. But it is hard to imagine a dog would talk about a delicious bone that it had 10 years ago 10 kilometers from where it lives

now to another dog.

Language and culture go hand with hand. When a language is transmitted to another place by another group of people, so is its culture transmitted along the way. For example, English hot is prevailing in China. With the transmission of this English language in China, cultures residing in this language came to China too. So nowadays, we are not unfamiliar with the term “Christmas”, “Valentine’s day”, especially to those who are equipped with enough knowledge.

Now it is time to introduce the widely agreed-upon definition of language. It is “language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication” (Dai & He, 2018, p. 7). The explanation of the words “arbitrary”, “vocal”, “human” and “communication” have already been discussed above.