

English Lexicology

英语词汇学

冯世梅 编著



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Introduction

“Lexicology”, which consists of General Lexicology and Special Lexicology, is one of the branches of linguistics. “English Lexicology” which belongs to the Special Lexicology aims at the investigation and the study of the morphological structure of English words, word equivalents, their semantic structures, relations, historical development, formation and uses.

This book mainly studies and analyzes Modern English vocabulary in some aspects. Based on the theory of Semantics and Grammar, the phenomenon of English vocabulary is synchronically and diachronically researched for the guidance of the practice of English language.

A good knowledge of morphological structure of English words and rules of word-formation will help learners develop their personal vocabulary and consciously increase their ability of word using. The information of the historical development and the principles of classification will give them a better understanding of word-meaning and enable them to organize, classify and store words more effectively. In a word, the study of lexicology will improve learners' receptive and productive skills in language processing as well as language production.

English teachers will find lexicology even more helpful. With some knowledge of lexicology, they will be able to handle the teaching material, particularly those concerning words more professionally. They will be able to select and organize material to teach in a more effective way.

Preface

Today, as the English position in the world is getting more and more stable, we need English urgently in order to go into the world. Like any other language, English consists of speech sound, grammatical structure and vocabulary. To learn English well, the very essential is to enlarge his/her vocabulary. English linguist Wilskin (1972) said, “Without grammar, very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed”. And British lexicologist Michael McCarthy also said (1990) “No matter how well the student learns grammar, no matter how successfully the sounds of L2 are mastered, without words to express a wide range of meanings, communication on a L2 just cannot happen in any meaningful way”.

From many years' experience, it seems to me that it is very difficult to master vocabulary, for English vocabulary increases so rapidly that its number reaches over 2,000,000 including scientific terminology, slang, dialect, neologism. English is one of the richest languages in the world among the 5,000 living languages.

In this book, the English lexicology is studied based on the theory of lexicology and the author's teaching experience, for the sake of English vocabulary teaching. Lexicology is a branch of linguistics, inquiring into the origins and meanings of words. English lexicology aims at investigating and studying the morphological structures of English words and word equivalents, their semantic structures, sense relations, word-formation and application.

The English lexicology itself is a sub-branch of linguistics. But it is closely related with the other branches of linguistics, such as morphology, semantics, etymology, stylistics, lexicography, etc.

The English lexicology, as an independent discipline, will be more and more stabilized in position. Word, a combination of sound, form and meaning, is a link between the language and the real world. In order to explore the essence of the language and solve the problems of the human world, it is necessary and inevitable to study the vocabulary systematically. The English lexicology in a broad sense will be an important subject in the future English studies.

The English lexicology, as an applied discipline, will be used more and more widely. The difficulties the vocabulary learning brings will force the English learners to seek systematic regularity of the English vocabulary. A study of English lexicology in a narrow sense will provide the English learners with much more useful knowledge, which is significant in English teaching.

The English lexicology, as a cross discipline, will develop more widely in its field. Language itself is a cross subject, which is revealed in the late 20th century. The English lexicology within the language possesses a relatively independent characteristic, and it is related closely to some subjects beyond the Lexicology, such as sociology, economy, politics, science and technology, psychology, etc. The broad English lexicology will be developed more and more widely to make the mankind better understand the real world and be able to remake the world.

Feng, Shimei

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2002

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1 English lexicology

1.1 Introduction

Lexicology, which contains two Greek morphemes: *lexikon* (word) and *logie* (learning or the study of), is the branch of linguistics, concerned with ‘the study of the meaning and uses of words’ (LDCE). English lexicology deals with English words, their origin, meaning, historical development, morphological structures, semantic structures, sense relations, idioms, formation and application. In short, it is the study of the signification and usage of English words.

English lexicology is a theory-based course in which the basic theories of English words are mainly discussed. Nevertheless, it is a practical course as well, for in the discussion, we will certainly deal with a great number of words and idiomatic expressions, and cite great many examples. There will, naturally, be a lot of practice concerned.

1.2 The relation of lexicology to other branches of linguistics

English lexicology itself is a branch of linguistics. However, it is closely related to other branches of linguistics, such as phonetics, morphology, grammar, semantics, etymology, stylistics, lexicography, etc, each of which has been established as a subject on its own.

1.2.1 To phonetics

Phonetics is the branch of linguistics which studies the char-

acteristics of speech sounds and provides methods for the description, classification and transcription.

It is closely connected with lexicology. Without sound there is no word because every word is a unity of sound and meaning.

1. 2. 2 To morphology

Morphology is the branch of linguistics, which studies the internal structure of words and rules by which words are formed. In other words, it identifies the smallest meaningful units in a language which are called morphemes and look into the ways the morphemes are arranged to form words.

Morphology is generally divided into two fields: the study of inflections (also called Inflectional Morphology) and the study of word-formation (often referred to as Lexical or Derivational Morphology).

This is one of the major concerns of lexicology, which discusses the inflections of words, the internal structure of words and methods of word-formation.

1. 2. 3 To grammar

Grammar is the study or the use of the rules by which words change their forms and are combined into sentences. Words and grammar are organically related to one another. In learning a language, both grammar and words are equally important. If language structures make up the skeleton of language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organs and the flesh. Grammatical knowledge allows us to generate sentences. At the same time, however, we must have something to say; we must have meanings that we wish to express, and we need to have a store of words that we can select from when we wish to express these meanings under the control of grammatical rules.

1. 2. 4 To semantics

Semantics is the branch of linguistics which studies the meanings of language in different linguistic levels: lexicon, syn-

tax, utterance, discourse, etc. Lexicology focuses on the lexical level. The types of meaning and sense relations, such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, polysemy, homonymy and semantic fields all belong to the semantic study and constitute an important part of lexicology.

1.2.5 To etymology

Etymology is the scientific study of the origins, history, and changing meanings of words. Modern English is derived from the languages of early Germanic tribes with a fairly small vocabulary. Lexicology deals with how this vocabulary has developed into a huge Modern English vocabulary and how the changes have taken place in the forms and meanings of words.

1.2.6 To stylistics

Stylistics is “the study of optional variations in the sounds, forms, or vocabulary of a language as characteristic of different uses of language, different situations of use, or different literary types.” Stylistics is concerned with language variety differing according to use rather than user. The same user may use different varieties for different purposes, different situations, in conversation with different people, to produce different effects. The same subject matter can be expressed in different styles, e. g.

(1) My beloved parent *has joined the great majority*. (or My beloved parent *has breathed his last*.) (literary)

(2) My dear father *has passed away*. (euphemistic)

(3) My father *has died*. (neutral)

(4) My old man *has kicked off*. (or My old man *has gone west*.) (slang)

(5) My dad *has popped off*. (colloquial)

The stylistic range is achieved by means of different word choices. Therefore, the study of words is significant for the study of language. Lexicology studies stylistic variants on the basis of meanings of words and their changes: synonyms,

antonyms, figures of speech, etc.

1.2.7 To lexicography

Lexicography, like lexicology, deals with the same problems: the form, meaning, origin and usage of words, but they have a pragmatic difference. The task for the lexicographers is to record the language as it is used so as to present the genuine picture of words to the readers, providing authoritative reference, whereas the learners of the lexicology is to acquire the knowledge and information of lexicon so as to enhance their lexical awareness and capacity of language use.

Though English lexicology covers very wide academic areas, we have a specific and consistent task of studying English words in different aspects and from different angle .

1.3 Two approaches to the study of English lexicology

There are two approaches, synchronic and diachronic, to the study of English lexicology. If we study English words as they exists at a particular point in time, it is synchronic study. For instance, one could carry out a synchronic description of the words of Beowulf, of Chaucer, of Shakespeare or of present-day English, disregarding whatever changes might take place. If we study English words as they exist in different historical periods, it is called diachronic study. That is to study words from the point of view of their historical development.

The following are examples that describe the difference between the two approaches and their interrelation.

From the synchronic point of view, the word *wife* now means ‘a married woman, esp. when considered in relation to her husband’. The word *Monday* means ‘the first day of the week’. The word *futureology* means the study of the future. From the diachronic point of view, the word *wife* is evolved from the Old English form *wif*, meaning ‘woman’, but later it be-

came specialized in the course of development to the modern meaning ‘a married woman’. The word *Monday* came from ‘mona + dæg’, that is ‘the day of the moon’. The word *futureology*, regarded as a derivative, is a hybrid, that is, word which is made of two parts, each from a different language. *Future* is a Latin root, *-ology* a Greek suffix.

Nowadays not only language teachers but also English lexicology teachers pay more attention to the synchronic approach to the study of the English vocabulary. They describe what the English vocabulary is like, rather than how it came to be that way.

1.4 Aims and significance of the course of English lexicology

Language study involves the study of speech sound, grammar and vocabulary (three elements of the language). All the words that make up a language constitute what is known as its vocabulary. Vocabulary has proved very important and rather difficult.

In learning a foreign language, it is very important to enlarge one's vocabulary. In order to learn and use English words correctly, those who major in the English language need to learn English lexicology. They need to learn what words mean and how they are used. Clearly, some words are more likely to be learnt at lower levels than others, and some uses of words may be more sophisticated than others—and, therefore, more appropriate for advanced learners. We should ensure that our students are aware of the vocabulary they need for their level and that they can use the words which they want to use.

English majors should know both the literal and figurative meanings of a word. For example, would we tell our best friend that they were ‘thin’, ‘slim’, ‘slender’, ‘lean’,

‘underweight’, ‘skinny’ or ‘emaciated’? And we should know *thin* is a general word to describe people who have little or no fat on their bodies. If someone is thin in a pleasant way, we say they are *slim* or (less common) *slender*. We could also say *lean* (= thin in a strong and healthy way) if people are too thin they are *skinny*, *underweight*, or (worst of all) *emaciated*. They also know how to change words—how to make ‘possible’ ‘impossible’, how to make ‘interesting’ ‘interested’ and so on.

Students need not only to recognize metaphorical language use, but also to know how words collocate. They also need to understand what stylistic and topical context words and expressions occur in.

A good command of word-structure and word-formation will help English learners to develop their personal ability to enlarge their vocabulary and improve their word power to use words. The historical development and the principles of classification of words will help the learners to have a deeper understanding of word-meaning and enable them to organize, classify and store words more effectively and sufficiently. The understanding of the semantic structures of words, the types of word meaning and their sense relations will gradually raise their awareness of meaning and usage, and enable them to use words more accurately and appropriately. A good knowledge of dictionaries will improve learners’ skills of using reference books and improve their problem-solving ability for efficiency of individual study.

In a word, the study of lexicology will ultimately improve learners’ receptive and productive skills in language learning as well as language production.

1.5 Questions and tasks

1. What is lexicology?
2. Describe the character and scope of English Lexicology.

3. Explain other branches of linguistics with which English Lexicology is interrelated.

4. Do you think it is important for a student of English to study English Lexicology?

5. Make comments on the following passage in about 200 words in terms of diction, syntax meaning, style, and rhetoric devices :

Before Hester can gather her wits about her (after being shocked by the news that Chillingworth will accompany them on the ship), the procession is heard approaching. First comes the music, played by the drum and some light woodwind instruments. Pearl is thrilled at the sound. Next in the procession come the soldiers, most of whom are gentlemen dressed in soldiers' uniforms. (They resemble the modern National Guard.) They, too are brilliantly dressed. Then are seen the magistrates (rulers) of the colony; Bradstreet, Endicott, Dulley and Bellingham. The magistrates are followed by the minister who is to deliver the Election Sermon -- Arthur Dimmesdale. He is a different Dimmesdale. His steps are not feeble; his body is not bent; his hand does not rest upon his heart. There is a spiritual look upon his face. He looks deep in thought. Hester watches him closely. She remembers some of their past moments together. He does not seem to be the same man that she has been encouraging with the thought of escaping Boston. Even little Pearl does not quite recognize him. She says that, if she had been sure who he was, she would have run to him and kissed him before all the people. Another observer of the procession is Mistress Hibbins, who is magnificently dressed with three ruffs around her neck, a gown of costly velvet, and a gold-headed cane. Mistress Hibbins whispers confidentially to Hester. She declares to Hester that Dimmesdale has been a part of the black Man's group in the forest. Mistress Hibbins says that Hester wears her token of sin