

英语语言学概论

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前 言

本书是一本英语专业入门性语言学教材。近年来，国内很多著名学者编写和出版了几种普通语言学教材，但针对本科的教学实践，有的过于偏重理论，有的过于艰涩，有很多不适宜的地方。

本教程汲取了语言学重要的研究成果，以国内高等专业的英语专业本科生为教授对象，内容针对性很强，文字简洁易懂，并能站在语言学的前沿，将语言教学和语言理论密切结合，具有很强的操作性。

全书共分十三章，即包括传统的内容：如语音学，音位学，形态学，语义学，语用学，语言和社会和文化，又对一些新兴的学科做了扼要的介绍，如认知，隐喻和语言习得，其中第六章将语篇分析和系统功能语法作为独立的章节作以论述，是一个很好的尝试，并且将其安排在语义学和语用学之间，能更好地体现语言学领域的综观以展，最后一章对语言学流派只做以简要的介绍。

由于编者水平有限，书中难免有不妥之处，恳请读者不吝指正。

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Chapter One Introduction

1.1 What is language?

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 produces 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 be aware that language is not entirely arbitrary, certain words are motivated. The best examples are the onomatopoeic words, such as rumble, crash, cackle, 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 /seif/ & 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 forlorn 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 Discreteness

The sounds used in language are meaningfully distinct. For example, the difference between a b sound and a p sound is not actually very great, but when these sounds are part of a language like English, they are used in such a way that the occurrence of one rather than the other is meaningful. The fact that the pronunciation of the forms pack and back leads to a distinction in meaning can only be due to the difference between the p and b sounds in English. This property of language is described as discreteness. Each sound in the language is treated as discrete. It is possible, in fact, to produce a range of sounds in a continuous stream which are all generally like the p and b sounds. These physically different sounds could be conceived of as the spoken counterpart of a written set.

However, that continuous stream will only be interpreted as being either a p sound, or a b sound f (or, possibly as a non-sound) in the language. We have a very discrete view of the sounds of our language and wherever a pronunciation, falls within the physically possible range of sounds, it will be interpreted as a linguistically specific and meaningfully distinct sound.

1.2.5 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 4000years 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.

1.3 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? could be 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:

Jakobson, the Prague school structuralist, defined the six primary factors of any speech event, namely: speaker, addressee, 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, ie, 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 Elements of language

If a young child sees a dog he may draw it to his mother's attention by pointing to it and saying 'dog'.

Even such a simple utterance involves a number of facets of language. The speaker has to recognize which category of the world around him the animal concerned belongs to and he has to know the label that attaches to that category. He has then to transmit the sequence of sounds that convey that label to the hearer, thereby generating the thought of a dog in the mind of that person. The study of words is Lexis and that of meaning, of the relationship between word and the real world, is semantics. The study of speech sound is Phonetics and, in the context of language systems, phonology. These facets of linguistics will be dealt with.

An older child may well say 'That dog is bigger than our dog'. This more complex utterance exhibits further facets. The word bigger is a complex word in that a modifying element has been added to the basic word big in order to express the idea of comparison. The words have to be assembled in a certain order to indicate the relationship between them; swapping round the phrases that dog and our dog would clearly completely change the sense of the sentence. The structure of words, morphology, is dealt with in chapter 4 and the structure of phrases and sentences, syntax, is dealt with in chapter 5.

A person in Glasgow might pronounce the word dog in the same way as he pronounces the word dug. A Glaswegian dustman is more likely to do so than is a Glaswegian solicitor. Here we are touching on the fields of regional variation and social variation which are dealt with in chapter 8.

1.5 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 article 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.

1.6 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.

As far as language is concerned, linguistics may deal with the different levels of the language system: phonemes, morphemes, words and sentences. In the study of the intralinguistic relationship among different linguistic elements, there are many branches such as phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics.

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