

AN INTRODUCTION TO LINGUISTICS

语言学导论

(修订本)

陈林华 编著

吉林大学出版社
TESOL 工作室

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Preface

Linguistic science has developed very rapidly in the last few decades. Books on this subject number in hundreds. Courses in linguistic science are very common in colleges and universities in China. Students of foreign languages and literature are now required to take a variety of courses in linguistics.

Linguistic science has a great influence on foreign language teaching and learning. No language teacher, especially no foreign language teacher, can escape linguistic theories and principles if he or she expects to do his or her teaching work effectively and on a scientific basis.

There are some excellent introductions to linguistics published in recent fifty years in China, but most of them are written in Chinese. Besides, they are mostly concerned with the Chinese language. Being students of English, they should have not only some common knowledge of general linguistics, but also some linguistic knowledge of their target language, which, I am sure, will help them a lot with their further study of English. AN INTRODUCTION TO LINGUISTICS is an attempt to meet the needs of Chinese students of English who wish to do their linguistic course work in their target language.

As the title suggests, this book is intended for students who have no previous knowledge of linguistics. In preparing the book I have drawn heavily on source materials from a variety of publications at home and abroad. At the end of each chapter are some exercises designed to help the students check and reinforce the knowledge they have gained from their course work.

AN INTRODUCTION TO LINGUISTICS is a textbook scheduled for one semester with two contact hours per week; therefore it is restricted to giving the most fundamental

principles and practices of modern linguistics.

This book owes a great deal to Professor Zhang Yanchang and some other professors who have offered me with many helpful comments. My warm thanks also go to the students whose feedback has contributed to many of the important improvements on the third edition.

Chen Linhua

May, 1999

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Chapter One Linguistics

Language has always been something of a mystery. People have been fascinated with it for thousand years. Many scholars have devoted themselves to the study of language. They have tried to reveal the mystery of the realm of language. It is, however, not an easy job, since language is an extremely complicated linguistic system. It involves great efforts and systematic or scientific observations, analyses, descriptions and interpretations. Although great developments have been seen and tremendous achievements have been made in the study of language, even greater efforts have to be made to the final goal of fully understanding human language.

1. Linguistics: Science of Language

Linguistics is generally defined as the science of language, or the scientific study of language. This definition, unexceptionable as far as it goes, is one that will be found in a large number of textbooks and popular introductions to this subject. Linguistics, as the science of language, means the study of language is considered worthy of learned attention and regular body of facts and theories is built up around it. Linguistics deals with the complicated system of language and the rules or principles operating in it. The purpose of studying linguistics is to examine the body of facts and to make general statements about its various elements that relate to regular

rules.

Linguistics differs from other sciences in that it both uses language as the tool and takes language as its object to study. Linguistics has, for this reason, been described as language about language.

The term “linguistics” was first used by historical linguists in the middle of the nineteenth century. The linguistic study of language before modern linguistics is the interpretation of classics for the study of philosophy, literature, logic and history. Such a traditional approach to language is usually termed **philology**.

Modern linguistics, as an independent science established by the Swiss linguist, F. de Saussure (1857—1913), the founder of **general linguistics**, began its history in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Linguistics, the science of language, is concerned with various aspects of language. It tries to tell people “what language is”, “how language originates, changes and develops”, “what common properties or characteristics that all languages share”, “how language works and functions in human communication” and many other facts about language.

2. Scope of Linguistics

Linguistics is a general term covering a wide range of various aspects of language and it is 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

interlinguistic relationships among different linguistic elements, there are many branches such as **phonetics**, **phonology**, **morphology**, **syntax** and **semantics**.

In the study of the extralinguistic relationships 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 but a few of them. They are interdisciplinary studies of language. These branches of linguistics are around the central core that mainly consists of phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics, which fall into the scope of **general linguistics**.

3. Approaches to Language

Different approaches may be made in the study of language. If we make a study of language from the point of view of its development in the course of time it is generally termed **diachronic** (or **historical**) **linguistics**. If the study is devoted to the description and analysis of a given linguistic status or stage of particular language, it is generally called **synchronic linguistics**.

It is generally accepted that languages of the world have both similarities and differences. If a comparative study of the similarities and differences among languages is made, it is called **comparative linguistics**.

In the linguistic study of language, aspects of a particular language at a particular point in time may be analysed and described. Such an approach to language is called **descriptive linguistics** which just describes how a language is actually used. Descriptive linguistics is often opposed to **historical linguistics**, which looks at the way groups of related languages develop and

to **prescriptive linguistics** which attempts to prescribe rules or principles for how people ought to use a language.

4. Grammar

Grammar is, in a broad sense, the science of the structure of a language and both the syntactic and semantic rules of its generally accepted use. To understand the nature of a language one must understand the nature of the internalized unconscious set of rules which is *part of the grammar of the language*.

Anyone who speaks a language knows the *grammar* of the language, which is said to exist in the minds of its speakers. The description of a language should be an actual model of the speakers' linguistic knowledge. Such a model is called **descriptive grammar**, which does not tell how the speakers should speak, but rather describes their basic linguistic knowledge, explains how it is possible for them to speak and understand and also explains what it is they know about the sounds, morphemes, words, phrases, clauses and sentences of their language.

There is another kind of grammar which is believed to represent the correct forms that all educated people should use in speech and writing. Such a grammar is called a **prescriptive grammar**, which prescribes the rules or principles of the grammar rather than describes them.

The grammar usually taught in classroom is the **pedagogical grammar**, which is a grammatical description of a language specially designed as an aid to teaching that language to native or foreign learners. It emphasizes the functional aspects of grammar rather than its theoretical categories. It states explicitly the rules of the language.

Linguists such as **Noam Chomsky** and his followers are

trying to make a study of the general properties of languages—— the universal properties found in all languages—— and the specific properties of an individual language. In their study, they hope to provide a better understanding of the nature of human language and to contribute to the understanding of the human mind. They attempt to find out the laws of a language, the laws common to all languages and the universal properties of languages. All these constitute what may be called a **universal grammar**. Such a grammar includes everything speakers know about their language. Some of these linguistic universals are concerned with the sound systems of languages. Discrete sound segments can be defined by a finite set of sound properties. Other phonological universals reveal that every language has both **vowels** and **consonants** and the rules which determine the phonetic representation of sentences. There are universals of **syntax** which reveal the ways in which sentences are formed. For example, every language has **subjects** and **predicates**, **statements** and **interrogatives**. There are also semantic universals which pertain to common semantic properties or features such as **male**, **female**, **animate**, **human**, **abstract** and **concrete**, which are found in all languages.

5. Schools of Linguistics

Language is closely related with man for it is used in his communication. Many scholars have devoted themselves to the study of language. They have adopted different approaches to language. In the history of linguistic study of language various schools have been founded, such as the **traditional grammar school**, the **European structuralist school**, the **American structuralist school**, the **transformational-generative school**, the **Prague school**, the **London school**, the **Geneva school**, the