2023年南开大学 855语言学基础考研核心笔记

《语言学教程》考研核心笔记

**Chapter 1 Invitations to Linguistics**

**1. Why study language?**

（1）Language is very essential to human beings.

（2）In language there are many things we should know.

（3）For further understanding, we need to study language scientifically.

**2. What is language?**

Language is a means of verbal communication. It is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human

communication.

**3. Design features of language**

The features that define our human languages can be called design features which can distinguish human

language from any animal system of communication.

（1）Arbitrariness

Arbitrariness refers to the fact that the forms of linguistic signs bear no natural relationship to their meanings.

（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.

（3）Creativity

Creativity means that language is resourceful because of its duality and its recursiveness. Recursiveness

refers to the rule which can be applied repeatedly without any definite limit. The recursive nature of language

provides a theoretical basis for the possibility of creating endless sentences.

（4）Displacement

Displacement means that human languages enable their users to symbolize objects, events and concepts

which are not present (in time and space) at the moment of conversation.

**4. Origin of language**

（1）The bow-wow theory

In primitive times people imitated the sounds of the animal calls in the wild environment they lived and

speech developed from that.

（2）The pooh-pooh theory

In the hard life of our primitive ancestors, they utter instinctive sounds of pains, anger and joy which

gradually developed into language.

（3）The “yo-he-ho” theory

As primitive people worked together, they produced some rhythmic grunts which gradually developed into

chants and then into language.

**5. Functions of language**

As is proposed by Jacobson, language has six functions:



①Referential: to convey message and information;

②Poetic: to indulge in language for its own sake;

③Emotive: to express attitudes, feelings and emotions;

④Conative: to persuade and influence others through commands and entreaties;

⑤Phatic: to establish communion with others;

⑥Metalingual: to clear up intentions, words and meanings.

Halliday (1994) proposes a theory of metafunctions of language. It means that language has three

metafunctions:

①Ideational function: to convey new information, to communicate a content that is unknown to the hearer;

②Interpersonal function: embodying all use of language to express social and personal relationships;

③Textual function: referring to the fact that language has mechanisms to make any stretch of spoken and

written discourse into a coherent and unified text and make a living passage different from a random list of

sentences.

According to Hu Zhuanglin, language has at least seven functions:

（1）Informative

The informative function means language is the instrument of thought and people often use it to

communicate new information.

（2）Interpersonal function

The interpersonal function means people can use language to establish and maintain their status in a society.

（3）Performative

The performative function of language is primarily to change the social status of persons, as in marriage

ceremonies, the sentencing of criminals, the blessing of children, the naming of a ship at a launching ceremony,

and the cursing of enemies.

（4）Emotive function

The emotive function is one of the most powerful uses of language because it is so crucial in changing the

emotional status of an audience for or against someone or something.

（5）Phatic communion

The phatic communion means people always use some small, seemingly meaningless expressions such as

Good morning, God bless you, Nice day, etc., to maintain a comfortable relationship between people without any

factual content.

（6）Recreational function

The recreational function means people use language for the sheer joy of using it, such as a baby’s babbling

or a chanter’s chanting.

（7）Metalingual function

The metalingual function means people can use language to talk about itself. E.g. I can use the word “book”

to talk about a book, and I can also use the expression “the word book” to talk about the sign “b-o-o-k” itself.

**6. What is linguistics?**

Linguistics is the scientific study of language. It studies not just one language of any one community, but the

language of all human beings.

**7. Main branches of linguistics**

（1）Phonetics

Phonetics is the study of speech sounds, it includes three main areas: articulatory phonetics, acoustic

phonetics, and auditory phonetics.

（2）Phonology



Phonology studies the rules governing the structure, distribution, and sequencing of speech sounds and the

shape of syllables.

（3）Morphology

Morphology studies the minimal units of meaning – morphemes and word-formation processes.

（4）Syntax

Syntax refers to the rules governing the way words are combined to form sentences in a language, or simply,

the study of the formation of sentences.

（5）Semantics

Semantics examines how meaning is encoded in a language.

（6）Pragmatics

Pragmatics is the study of meaning in context.

**8. Macrolinguistics**

Macrolinguistics is the study of language in all aspects, distinct from microlinguistics, which dealt solely

with the formal aspect of language system.

（1）Psycholinguistics

Psycholinguistics investigates the interrelation of language and mind, in processing and producing utterances

and in language acquisition for example.

（2）Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics is a term which covers a variety of different interests in language and society, including the

language and the social characteristics of its users.

（3）Anthropological linguistics

Anthropological linguistics studies the relationship between language and culture in a community.

（4）Computational linguistics

Computational linguistics is an interdisciplinary field which centers around the use of computers to process

or produce human language.

**9. Important distinctions in linguistics**

（1）Descriptive vs. prescriptive

To say that linguistics is a descriptive science is to say that the linguist tries to discover and record the rules

to which the members of a language-community actually conform and does not seek to impose upon them other

rules, or norms, of correctness.

Prescriptive linguistics aims to lay down rules for the correct use of language and settle the disputes over

usage once and for all.

For example, “Don’t say X.” is a prescriptive command; “People don’t say X.” is a descriptive statement.

The distinction lies in prescribing how things ought to be and describing how things are. In the 18th century, all

the main European languages were studied prescriptively. However, modern linguistics is mostly descriptive

because the nature of linguistics as a science determines its preoccupation with description instead of prescription.

（2）Synchronic vs. diachronic

A synchronic study takes a fixed instant (usually at present) as its point of observation. Saussure’s diachronic

description is the study of a language through the course of its history. E.g. a study of the features of the English

used in Shakespeare’s time would be synchronic, and a study of the changes English has undergone since then

would be a diachronic study. In modern linguistics, synchronic study seems to enjoy priority over diachronic study.

The reason is that unless the various state of a language are successfully studied it would be difficult to describe

the changes that have taken place in its historical development.

（3）Langue & parole



Saussure distinguished the linguistic competence of the speaker and the actual phenomena or data of

linguistics as langue and parole. Langue is relative stable and systematic, parole is subject to personal and

situational constraints; langue is not spoken by an individual, parole is always a naturally occurring event. What a

linguist should do, according to Saussure, is to draw rules from a mass of confused facts, i.e. to discover the

regularities governing all instances of parole and make them the subject of linguistics.

（4）Competence and performance

According to Chomsky, a language user’s underlying knowledge about the system of rules is called the

linguistic competence, and the actual use of language in concrete situations is called performance. Competence

enables a speaker to produce and understand and indefinite number of sentences and to recognize grammatical

mistakes and ambiguities. A speaker’s competence is stable while his performance is often influenced by

psychological and social factors. So a speaker’s performance does not always match his supposed competence.

Chomsky believes that linguists ought to study competence, rather than performance. Chomsky’s

competence-performance distinction is not exactly the same as, though similar to, Saussure’s langue-parole

distinction. Langue is a social product and a set of conventions of a community, while competence is deemed as a

property of mind of each individual. Saussure looks at language more from a sociological or sociolinguistic point

of view than Chomsky since the latter deals with his issues psychologically or psycholinguistically.

（5）Etic vs. emic

[These two terms are still very vague to me. After I read Ji Daohong’s book, I can understand them better, but

because they are vaguely mentioned in Hu’s book, it seems very difficult for me to understand them fully. –

icywarmtea]

Being etic means researchers’ making far too many, as well as behaviorally and inconsequential,

differentiations, just as often the case with phonetics vs. phonemics analysis in linguistics proper.

An emic set of speech acts and events must be one that is validated as meaningful via final resource to the

native members of a speech community rather than via appeal to the investigator’s ingenuity or intuition alone.

Following the suffix formations of (phon)etics vs (phon)emics, these terms were introduced into the social

sciences by Kenneth Pike (1967) to denote the distinction between the material and functional study of language:

phonetics studies the acoustically measurable and articulatorily definable immediate sound utterances, whereas

phonemics analyzes the specific selection each language makes from that universal catalogue from a functional

aspect.

End of Chapter 1

