A Course in Linguistics

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PREFACE

The book was not intended to be a textbook at the beginning. I have to teach in English as I am working at the Department of Applied English at Southern Taiwan University of Science and Technology. It is true that I wrote in Chinese two different introductory textbooks for different purposes. Most of the data used there were novel and some were even based on unpublished research. They were, to some extent, of great value to me. In practical teaching, those data ran naturally into my lectures. In the process of editing the lectures into a book, I tried very hard to erase those published data. However, some were still left, though they appeared in English this time.

The readers are supposed to be English majors at the college level, who are not trained to be linguists in particular. For this reason, basic concepts about linguistics required for beginners are fully provided with a detailed illustration. The essential goal is to help teachers lead the students into a new field of humanity science: *linguistics*. Some of the terminologies and ideas might be foreign to students. However, more data together with further interpretation in this volume are expected to help them overcome difficulties in reading. Even if this is the case, I am still of the position that not every student was born or trained to be a linguist. When I was a college student, I was one of those who did not like linguistics. I was all at sea in the linguistic class. Nevertheless, what I was did nothing to stop what I am. For this reason, no student can be deprived of her/his right to be sitting comfortably in a linguistics class.

When I was asked to teach *An Introduction to English Linguistics* for those who wanted to be teachers, I spent a lot of time searching for a good textbook for this course. Although there were different versions of textbooks in the market, more than needed indeed, there were few suitable for our students as beginners. Most of the imported textbooks were both expensive and complicated in writing. Furthermore, most of the linguistic terminologies were illustrated with African or other un-known languages, which made teachers and learners feel even worse.

Under such circumstances, the idea occurred to me that I had to write a textbook in English. That's the basic motivation for this volume. The goal of this book is essentially twofold. On the one hand, the price of the textbook should be less than half of most English textbooks in linguistics. On the other, most of the basic concepts should be interpreted on the basis of Mandarin, Southern Min, Hakka, or any Formosan language data. In other words, this is kind of nativized version of textbook on general linguistics.

Manuscripts of this book at different stage were used for teaching materials in the graduate and the undergraduate programs in the past three years. I would like to thank my students at Southern Taiwan University of Science and Technology for insightful feedbacks, most of which have been integrated here. In addition, many thanks are due to my assistants. Without their help, this work can never be possible. Finally, I sincerely thank the team of Cosmo Publishing Co. Ltd., who help this book come into being.

Chapter

1

Language and Linguistics

We speak and hear every day to exchange information, which constitutes the basis of communication. Most of our communication goes smoothly because we share the common language. We speak the same sounds, using the same words, semantics, and sentence structure. However, once in a while, we feel frustrated when we are misunderstanding and misunderstood. In a word, language is of two aspects. On the one hand, it provides us with a common basis on which we communicate with each other without failure. On the other, language is subject to conveying diversified meanings on different occasions. These two aspects of language are, in our terms, linguistic competence and communicative competence, the exploration of which results in the present volume.

In the field of linguistics, to know a language means we have got the linguistic knowledge of that language, including phonological, syntactic, morphological, and semantic knowledge. In other words, we have got the linguistic intuition or competence of that language. Linguistic competence helps us (a) produce all the grammatical and acceptable sentences, and (b) prevent any ungrammatical sentences from being produced. However, when we claim we have got linguistic competence, it does not mean that we can do successful linguistic performance, because we have to get communicative competence.

Communicative competence is involved with language use in social and cultural contexts. Putting together what we have found in the studies of linguistic competence and performance results in, hopefully, a picture of what a language is.

In this chapter, five topics are coped with, namely, language, grammar, linguistic competence, Universal Grammar, and social settings. Moreover, the contents of this volume are briefly outlined.

1 Language

There are two issues that contemporary linguistics attempts to address: (a) to what extent does it mean to know a language, and (b) why can children acquire a language in such a short time?

1.1 Language and writing systems

All the languages can be spoken, but not all languages can be written. For instance, there are a lot of Indian languages without being written down. Likewise, languages used to be spoken by Pingpu here in Taiwan are now fading away, most of which were not written or recorded. Linguists nowadays adopt IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) to transcribe languages without a writing system by way of field work. One thing to be noted is that languages are natural, while writing systems are artificial. All the writing systems were invented. Therefore, it is always true that languages precede writing systems. Some writing system stops being used although the language is still spoken. For instance, there are more than five thousand people speaking the Naxi language, but the writing system of Naxi, *Dongba*, is not in use for the time being.

A certain language works without sounds, e.g. sign language for the blind or the deaf. Some languages are only expressed in written forms but they are not spoken out, e.g. most languages used for computer programmers. Both sign languages and programming languages are not acquired in natural environments, and hence they are artificial languages. All the natural languages can be spoken out in a speech community, and they are acquired naturally for native speakers.

1.2 Language and symbol

Natural languages comprise phonological systems, in addition to syntactic, morphological, and semantic ones. Languages without writing systems are transcribed by a phonetic system, IPA or revised IPA. Before IPA, some languages were written in a certain symbols, like Oracle Bone Script in ancient China.

There are three types of symbols, namely, icon, index, and symbol. Icon refers to something substantial, for instance, when we meet with @, it occurs to us that it is an e-mail address. When we look at the sign ⚠, we know that ahead is a curve. An index is a sign system for information. For instance, when we look at 🍴, we know

that there is a restaurant ahead. As we can see, there is no great difference between indexes and icons, both being signs for information. However, symbols are somewhat different in that they are associated with some specific reference. For example, we use 'book' (book is a symbol) for the reference of , just as we use 書 for the same reference in Chinese. The association between symbols like *book* or 書 to the reference is entirely arbitrary.

Based on this arbitrary association, scholars founded an association for the invention of symbols for phonetic transcription. The association is International Phonetics Association (IPA), founded in 1897. The phonetic system is International Phonetics Alphabet, also abbreviated as IPA. The basic intention is to use this system to transcribe all the languages in the world. However, when put into practice, it was found that this system was far from adequate. Some versions of modification or revision were in need. The present IPA was based on 1995 version. However, the phonetic system used for the transcription of English sounds in Taiwan is K. K. Phonetic symbols, which was created by J. S. Kenyon and T. A. Knott in their *A Pronouncing Dictionary of American English.* For the convenience of reading, we have a list of comparison between IPA and KK in the inner page of the front cover.

2 Grammar

Grammar in this book is different from the term *grammar* used in English teaching. The grammar that we have been familiar with is concerned with pedagogy, and thus it is pedagogical grammar or prescriptive grammar. The one we use here is theoretical grammar.

2.1 Prescriptive grammar

When a doctor prescribes, all the patients, be he a king or a beggar, have to abide by. Thus prescriptive grammar is usually adopted in schools, requiring the students to memorize a lot of grammatical rules. Even if some rules are out of date, they have to be followed. For instance, it requires the past tense of *dream* to be *dreamt*, without regard the fact that *dreamed* is used in a lot of newspapers or magazines. Since prescriptive grammar is too strict to be followed, descriptive grammar begins to attract attentions.

Prescriptive grammar is also pedagogical grammar, which is till prevailing for grammar schools or in the schools teaching English as a foreign language, e.g. Taiwan, Japan, and Korea.

2.2 Descriptive grammar

Quite different from prescriptive grammar, descriptive grammar aims to describe what has been spoken or what has been written in English. Its job is to describe what is collected. For this reason, all the possible sentences are collected and analyzed.

In practical teaching, there are always conflicts between descriptive and prescriptive grammar. If an ungrammatical sentence is found in a written book, what should teachers do? This is indeed a challenge.

In sum, prescriptive grammar asks the learners to follow the rules, without considering whether some of the rules are out of date. In contrast, descriptive grammar attempts to describe what is written or is spoken in a language.

Review
- ① Are there languages without written systems?
  Are there languages without sounds?
- ② Why should we need a phonetic system?
- ③ What is prescriptive grammar? What is descriptive grammar?
  What is the difference between these two?

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3 Linguistic Knowledge

Grammar in modern linguistic theories is neither descriptive nor prescriptive, but it refers to our linguistic knowledge. Note that when linguistic knowledge is referred, it also means linguistic intuition or language faculty. In the acquisition, what we acquire is the grammar of a certain language. When we claim that we know a language, it means that we can produce grammatical sentences and prevent ungrammatical sentences from being produced. The question now is: What is language knowledge? It is, in general, composed of lexical, phonological, syntactic, and semantic knowledge.

3.1 Lexical knowledge

Lexicon is the basic unit of a language. Starting from the stage of babbling, babies like to ask, 'What is this?' To this question, parents are pleased to reply by a baby directive language like 'milk, mi-l-k, table, ta-ble' etc. Gradually, children edit their own mental lexicon, just like a full-fledged dictionary. When children get to a certain stage, all the lexica can be directly inserted to the terminal nodes of an X-bar structure, resulting in sentences.

From the lexical input, children would generate some morphological rules:

(1)

    a.   That book interested me.
    b.   That book was interesting.
    c.   I was interested in that book.
    d.   I had great interest in that book.

From the data in (1), children acquire the categories of the same word *interest*. In (1a), it is the past tense of *interest*. According to the morphological rule, it is suffixed with -ed. In (1b), it is an adjective, which results from *interest* suffixed with -ing. In (1c), it is a case of experience, so *be interested in* is used. In (1d), *interest* is used as a noun, no change in need.

3.2 Phonological knowledge

Phonological knowledge is composed of phone/segment, phonemes, syllables, and stress. All the sounds are further decomposed into smaller units. The basic unit of phonetic sounds is phone or segment. For instance, in [bʊk] there are three phones: [b], [k], [k]. Each phone is an inventory. Some phones are phonemic, while others are not. In English there are 24 phonemes. Those 24 phonemes constitute English phonetic inventories.

Phonemes can further be syllabified into a syllable according to the phonotactic rules or constraints. In English, for instance, a canonical template for a syllable is: $C_{0-3}VC_{0-3}$, which means that it allows 0-3 consonants at the onset (preceding the vowel) and 0-3 consonants at the coda (following the vowel), e.g. *a*t, *t*en, *p*l*ease*, *spr*ing, *ha*nd, *atte*mpt.

When we acquire the phonological knowledge of English, we are able to produce all the possible sounds and syllables in English. Meanwhile, we are able to judge what syllables are impossible in English.