



CHAPTER 1



INTRODUCING LEXICOLOGY

词汇学导引



*Your vocabulary represents your style, your image,
and your personality!*





1.1 The Scope of Lexicology 词汇学的范畴

Lexicology, a branch of linguistics, deals with the nature, history, use, and meaning of words and the relationships between elements of words. Words all together constitute vocabulary. In other words, a study of English lexicology is actually a study of the English vocabulary, or the English words.

Linguists usually define a word as the smallest unit of a language. In fact, a word is only a symbol, a representation of something in life, either physical or abstract. People invented words to symbolize the world around them. Without words, there would have been no language. Yet a word, when standing alone, usually represents a very limited meaning. To express complex concepts, a word must function together with other words. Thus, clusters, collocations, and sentences are also studied in lexicology. The use of words in various contexts is called word application.

linguistics 语言学
cluster 词块
collocation 词的搭配
phonetics 语音学
phonology 音韵学
semantics 语义学
etymology 词源学
lexicography 词典学

Lexicology is interlinked with other branches of linguistics, such as phonetics, phonology, and semantics. However, as an individual branch of linguistics, lexicology mainly covers the origin, development, structure, meaning, and application of words. Etymology, which can be regarded as a subfield of lexicology, mainly focuses on the study of the origin and history of words. Lexicography, another related branch to lexicology, is mainly concerned with the inclusion of words and the science of compiling dictionaries. Since there are too many English words to cover in all lexical perspectives, we may have to narrow down our lexicological study to two practical areas: the formation of words and the application of words.

Exercise 1-01 Translate the following groups of sentences into Chinese.

- 1a. Coal **abounds** in this province.
- 1b. Coal is **abundant** in this province.
- 1c. This province **abounds** with coal.
- 1d. The **abundance** of coal in the province propels its economic development.
- 2a. **Spring**, summer, autumn, and winter each has its unrivaled charms.





- 2b. Crystal water wells out of the **spring**.
- 2c. One of the **springs** in the mattress needs replacement.
- 2d. Tourism is **springing** up in this region.

1.2 The Significance of Studying Vocabulary 学习词汇的意义

Possessing a large English vocabulary is a critical skill in the acquisition of English as a second language. It is an ability that everyone admires and dreams to attain. In terms of listening and reading, a substantial vocabulary helps you gain a smooth and accurate understanding of a discourse. It enables you to comprehend more than the literal expressions of speakers or writers. In terms of speaking and writing, an affluent vocabulary helps you express your thoughts faithfully and gain the interest of your audience. It adds color, vigor, and value to what you say and what you write. In all, a good mastery of the English vocabulary will equip you with power and confidence for all kinds of English communication. And your vocabulary level represents your style, your image, your educational achievement, your aesthetic standard, and your unique personality.

In spite of the numerous approaches to augmenting the volume of your vocabulary, you will soon find that a lexical study remains one of the most efficient methods that you can depend on. On the basic level of a lexical study, you will be able to see the amazing transformations of words, which can be segmented into smaller elements, which can conglomerate into new words, and which correlate and interact with each other. On an advanced level of a lexical study, you will be able to discern the overwhelming strengths of words that can purify, enliven, and glamorize common expressions.

Analyze the following sentences. They are all immaculate grammatically, but they differ in vigor and intensity.

- 1a. Tsinghua University is famous in the world. It has excellent professors and researchers.
- 1b. Tsinghua University is well-known in the world for its excellent faculty and outstanding research teams.





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- 1c. Tsinghua University is renowned in the world for its rigorous faculty and dynamic research force.
- 1d. Tsinghua University is recognized worldwide for its academic excellence and research strength.
- 2a. Jiuzhaigou is a beautiful place. Come to see the beautiful scenery.
- 2b. Come to Jiuzhaigou, and see the great natural scenery.
- 2c. Come to Jiuzhaigou, and enjoy the extraordinary beauty of nature.
- 2d. Come to Jiuzhaigou, and discover the unique glamor of nature.
- 3a. If there is no justice, there will be hatred. If there is hatred, violence will happen.
- 3b. Wherever there is no justice, there is hatred. Wherever there is hatred, there is violence.
- 3c. Injustice leads to hatred; hatred causes violence.
- 3d. Injustice breeds hatred; hatred ignites violence.
- 4a. In modern times, there are many opportunities and challenges.
- 4b. In modern times, we face numerous opportunities and challenges.
- 4c. We live in an age in which opportunities and challenges coexist.
- 4d. We live in an exciting epoch in which boundless opportunities challenge our maximum wisdom.
- 5a. In order for all the tenants to be happy, the Management Committee wants everyone to follow these regulations.
- 5b. In order for all the tenants to be benefited, the Management Committee wants everyone to observe the following regulations.
- 5c. For the benefits of all the tenants, the Management Committee requires everyone to abide by the following regulations.
- 5d. In the best interest of all the tenants, the Management Committee enforces the following policies.

In each group, four levels of expressions are listed, indicating the same or similar meaning. Which level do you prefer? Which level have you achieved? What has impressed you most? Why does one level excel another? As you can see, advanced English expressions, on the basis of grammatical accuracy, inevitably involve witty choices and applications of words. Yet before you reach that level of maturity, you need to build up a large volume of vocabulary as a foundation.



Very often, we need extraordinary words to describe extraordinary concepts. Look at the following poster about Jiuzhaigou. Pay particular attention to the vocabulary used to depict this marvelous natural wonder.

Jiuzhaigou

- One of the world heritages renowned for its extraordinary untouched glamor.
- A marvelous, exquisite geographical masterpiece slowly crafted by Mother Nature through ages.
- A spectacular natural wonder that you can find nowhere else.
- An enchanting fairyland of magic that challenges your imagination.

Explore this unique kingdom of marvels!
Discover the breathtaking surprises at every turn!

This course aims at three goals. First, it will introduce the basic concepts of lexicology. Next it will lead you through a program of mechanical studies of word formation so that you will be able to build up a substantial vocabulary. Then, it will show you the secret arts of word choice and word application. All these steps are designed as milestones pointing to the same destination—to empower you to become a proficient English language user. Throughout the course, various lexicological concepts are introduced, but they serve as the means, not as the end. The only end of a meaningful study of lexicology for college students should always reflect vocabulary building and vocabulary application.

Exercise 1-02 Rewrite the following sentences by applying the best vocabulary you know.

- 1) He got poor school grades because he spent too much time playing Internet games.
- 2) The company has not kept enough money to develop new products.
- 3) You can call our customer service representatives at any time. We are open 24 hours a day and 7 days a week.
- 4) A strict college education is good for your future. You will be able to overcome difficulties in your job.



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- 5) We respect this man because he always wants to do his best and he never gives up in bad luck.
- 6) Some lexical textbooks are too difficult to read. They are full of lexicological vocabulary, which students have to learn but will not use in a thousand years.

1.3 Lexicology and Linguistic Studies 词汇学与 语言学研究

McArthur (1992) defines lexicology as an area of language study concerned with the nature, meaning, history, and use of words and word elements, and often with the critical description of lexicography. This definition suggests that lexicology is interlinked with other branches of micro-linguistics, such as phonetics and phonology, morphology, semantics, and grammar. It is also closely related with some branches of macro-linguistics, such as stylistics and sociolinguistics. We will discuss how they are related in this part and hope it will be helpful for your study of lexicology and your understanding of linguistics as a whole.

micro-linguistics 微观语言学
macro-linguistics 宏观语言学
sociolinguistics 社会语言学

1.3.1 Lexicology, Phonetics, and Phonology 词汇学与语音学、 音韵学

The major objective of lexicology is “word.” The spoken form of a word and its sound features in lexicological studies overlap with phonetics and phonology. Phonetics aims to examine the production, transmission, and perception of speech sounds, and phonology is concerned with the function of sounds and sound patterns as linguistic items. Phoneme is the smallest unit of sound employed to form meaningful contrasts between utterances. Phonemes perform the distinctive function differentiating words (e.g. *stop—pots*). A different sound sequence results in a different word, as the example suggests. And sometimes stress is also used for differentiating words (parts of speech, e.g. *present* as a noun—*present* as a verb). Our knowledge of words is not complete without knowing their sound forms and





features of phoneme in studying lexicology. Phonetics and phonology are useful for etymologists in the study of words' origins and their changes in forms and meanings.

1.3.2 Lexicology and Morphology 词汇学与形态学

The overlapping points of lexicology and morphology are numerous. Both disciplines take words as their primary subject and both focus on the correspondence between forms and meanings of words. The essential difference between the two sister disciplines is a matter of emphasis: Morphology is word grammar with meaning, while lexicology is word semantics with form.

August Schleicher, a German linguist, first used “morphology” to refer to the study of the form of words. In present-day linguistics, the term “morphology” refers to the study of the internal structure of words, and of the systematic form-meaning correspondences between words. Lexicology relies on morphology for information about construction of words, parts of words, and distinction between different types of words. Morphology is particularly relevant in the discussion of word formation in later chapters of this book.

1.3.3 Lexicology and Semantics 词汇学与语义学

Lexicology is closely connected with semantics, the study of meaning. Semantics aims to describe and explain the meanings in natural language. Most linguists agree that meaning pervades the whole of language and there are different kinds of semantics, such as lexical semantics, sentence semantics, and text or discourse semantics. Lexical semantics deals with the meaning of words and the meaning relations that are internal to the vocabulary of a language. Sentence semantics focuses on the meanings of sentences and the semantic structures of sentences based on the meaning of individual lexemes and their syntactic roles in the given sentence. Discourse semantics aims to investigate the meanings of sentences and their relation with the context or discourse in which they are embedded. Lexical semantics is the interface between lexicology and semantics. It is the most significant part of lexicology and is also the most robust in semantics.





1.3.4 Lexicology and Grammar 词汇学与语法

The connection between lexicology and grammar is strong and we may categorize these two as one interrelated discipline in linguistics: “lexico-grammar” or “grammar-lexicology.” Grammar and lexicology are intermingled in many aspects. Both of them focus on “word”: In grammar, all words belong to certain part(s) of speech and follow certain grammar rules; in lexicology, words have grammatical meanings, and any word can perform a grammatical function or occur in certain grammatical patterns. For example, objects consisting of two halves are always plural (e.g. *scissors*). Sometimes a grammatical form becomes a basis for new words (e.g. *he looks—his looks*). This is called the process of lexicalization of grammatical forms. The essential difference between grammar and lexicology is that the former deals with the forms and structures of words and the latter with meanings of words. Grammar deals with rules and regularities that apply to classes of words as a whole, whereas lexicology is concerned with the way individual words operate and affect other words in the same context. Grammar is the study of the grammatical structure of language. It is concerned with the various means of expressing grammatical relations between words as well as with the patterns of word groups and sentences. It aims to categorize and demonstrate the various forms words can take, and then explain how these forms are arranged into sentences. Lexicology is concerned with meanings of words, either topically as a thesaurus, or indexically as a dictionary, adding glosses and definitions. Halliday and Colin (2007) made the comment that “there is no exact point where the lexicologist stops and grammarian takes over; each one can readily enter into the territory of the other.”

1.3.5 Lexicology and Stylistics 词汇学与文体学

Lexicology is also closely connected to stylistics. Both lexicology and stylistics focus on the differentiation of word use, the way meaning is transferred, semantic structure of words, and connotations of the words used. Stylistics studies many problems treated in lexicology such as the nature, function, meaning, and styles of words. It attempts to establish principles capable of explaining the particular choices made by individuals and social groups in their use of language,





the production and reception of meaning, critical discourse analysis, and literary criticisms. Other features of stylistics include the use of dialogs (including regional accents and people's dialects), descriptive language, the use of grammar (such as the active voice or passive voice), the distribution of sentence lengths, the use of particular language registers, etc. In addition, stylistics examines the connections between the forms and effects within a particular variety of language. The knowledge of connotations and history of words, the image of word roots, and their stylistic property is the domain of lexicology, which is very useful in the study of stylistics. Lexicology does the similar work with words and looks at what is going on with the meanings of words, how different types of meanings are interrelated in the language, and how different words are selected for a different meaning and/or style. It is, in a sense, a stylistic lexicology.

1.3.6 Lexicology and Sociolinguistics 词汇学与社会语言学

The social nature of language and its correlation with its vocabulary are where lexicology and sociolinguistics interact. The vocabulary of any language develops and reflects changes in social life. Similarly every new impact on society is reflected in vocabulary. As society is changing, the vocabulary in a language is never rigid or stable, but is always growing and changing. Sociolinguistics is a branch of science which deals with covariation of social changes and language changes. The most notable change of language or social influence upon language lies in the area of vocabulary. It is obvious that lexicologists are able to examine the meanings and changes of words in a language better when they take into account the stratification of society and find points of contact between social life and the vocabulary. In addition, a lexicological analysis of word meaning will help identify or distinguish speakers and their social and cultural backgrounds, their attitudes, and their purposes.

1.4 Research Methods in Lexicology 词汇学研究方法

Associated with terms such as “lexeme,” “lexical field,” “lexicon,” and “lexis,” lexicology attempts to offer a more useful and detailed basis for the study





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of language than the terms “word” and “vocabulary.” How does lexicology do it? What are the methods and techniques used in lexicology? According to Halliday and Colin (2007), there are two major methods used in lexicology: by writing a dictionary and by writing a thesaurus.

In a dictionary, each word is presented by itself as an independent piece of work and all words are arranged according to the alphabetical order. Dictionaries provide information about words included in dictionary entries. Most dictionaries organize the contents for each entry in six categories:

- 1) the headword, or the lemma, often in bold font, easy for readers to locate;
- 2) its pronunciation, usually in the form of alphabetic or phonetic notation;
- 3) information about the word class (part of speech);
- 4) word origin or the information of etymology;
- 5) definition, the description of the meaning;
- 6) citations, examples, or sentences showing how the word is used in context.

In a thesaurus, you will not see words as an independent entry. You will instead see words in groups. Words are not arranged alphabetically, but are grouped together according to meaning. For example, all words that are related to

taxonomy 分类学
diachronic 历时的
synchronic 共时的

the emotions, or all words related to building a house, are arranged together. It is the work of lexical taxonomy, which organizes all words into classes, sub-classes, and sub-sub-classes.

Two major approaches are employed in lexicological studies: diachronic approach and synchronic approach. They are also two principal approaches to the study of language. All languages exist in a state of constant change and development. In language studies, linguists may investigate the history and stages of language change (diachronic) in a course of time. It is historical lexicology. At the same time, they can study the language use, features and variation within a certain stage of its development (synchronic). Then it is descriptive lexicology.

In the studies of lexicology, scholars may have different approaches or emphases. This is very natural and normal. According to the contents of their research, lexicology is usually classified into: 1) general lexicology—the general study of words, irrespective of the specific features of any particular language; 2) special lexicology—the description of the vocabulary of a given language;





3) historical lexicology—the study of the evolution of a vocabulary as well as of its elements, a branch which discusses the origins, changes, and development of words; 4) descriptive lexicology—the study dealing with the description of the vocabulary of a given language at a given stage of its development.

As lexicology examines all aspects of the way words are used and developed, a diverse spectrum of interests and various research methods are involved. For instance, when lexicologists study the meaning of a word and the semantic relations between words, they often explore the origin and history of the word. Another example is the study of collocations. Statistic analysis and corpus techniques are used to calculate the frequency of word collocations so as to recognize collocation patterns.

Lexicology, as a branch of linguistics, has its own aims and methods of scientific research. It aims to study and systematically describe vocabulary with respect to its origin, development, and current use. Lexicology is concerned with words, variable word groups, phraseological units, and morphemes which make up words.

Related fields with lexicology are etymology and lexicography. Etymology is mainly concerned with words' origins; lexicography is about the application of lexicology—the science of dictionaries. Two more newly emerged disciplines that are related to lexicology are computational lexicology and phraseology. Computational lexicology is concerned with the use of computers in the study of lexicon, or the use of computers in the study of machine-readable dictionaries. Phraseology mainly describes the context in which a word is used, including typical usages and sequences, such as idioms, phrasal verbs, and multi-word lexical units.

It will be seen from this book that lexicology will be able to offer much to our understanding of word meaning. With the development of modern technology, lexicological research can now exploit the potential of IT and corpus approaches. Inevitably we will see new changes and development of lexicology in the near future.





1.5 Questions for Further Study 学习思考题

1. What is the scope of lexicology? How is lexicology related to lexicography and etymology?
2. What is the significance of lexical studies? What are the significant roles “words” play in language communication and language learning?
3. What other linguistic disciplines are related to lexicology? Could you demonstrate how they are related?
4. What are the major research methods used in the study of lexicology?
5. Could you tell the differences between a dictionary and a thesaurus with examples?
6. What are diachronic approach and synchronic approach in lexicological study?

