

大学生英语阅读系列丛书

文 化 与 交 际

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Contents 目录

第一部分 简介文化与交际	(1)
1. Culture and Human Behavior 文化与人类行为	(1)
2. Culture and Its Components 文化及文化要素	(7)
3. Communication and Intercultural Communication 交际与跨文化交际.....	(15)
4. Types of Communication 交际的类型.....	(22)
5. Basic Elements of the Communication Process 交际过程中的基本要素.....	(31)
6. Causes of Cultural Breakdowns 文化交际失败的原因	(40)
7. Cultural Adjustment 文化适应.....	(47)
8. Cultural Values and Dimensions 文化价值观和范畴	(54)
9. Misunderstanding People from Other Cultures 对来自其他文化人们的误解.....	(68)
第二部分 语言交际	(84)
10. Verbal Communication: The Way People Speak	

语言交际：人们讲话的方式	(84)
11. Variations in Verbal Style	
语言风格的差异	(94)
12. Forms of Address	
称谓方式	(107)
13. Introductions and Topic Choice	
介绍方式和话题选择	(115)
第三部分 非语言交际	(127)
14. Nonverbal Communication	
非语言交际	(127)
15. Types of Nonverbal Communication	
非语言交际的类型	(142)
16. Body Language	
体态语	(155)
17. Nonverbal Messages	
非语言信息	(162)
第四部分 人际交际	(170)
18. Making Contact	
建立联系	(170)
19. Perception of Ourselves and Others	
对自我和他人的认识	(183)
20. Interpersonal Skills	
社交技巧	(197)
21. Relationships: Friends and Acquaintances in the United States	
人际关系：美国人概念中的朋友和相识的人 ...	(205)

22. Male-Female Relationship in the United States	
美国男女之间的关系·····	(217)

第五部分 文化观念与风俗····· (228)

23. Differences in Customs	
风俗差异·····	(228)
24. American Values and Assumptions (I)	
美国人的价值观和信条 (一) ·····	(234)
25. American Values and Assumptions (II)	
美国人的价值观和信条 (二) ·····	(245)
26. Education: Values and Expectations	
教育: 价值观和期望值·····	(258)
27. Education in the United States	
美国的教育·····	(270)
28. Gender Roles in a Cross-cultural Perspective	
从跨文化角度看性别角色·····	(285)
29. The Cultural Patterning of Time	
时间的文化方式·····	(293)
30. Gift Giving and Receiving in Different Cultures	
不同文化的馈赠和接受礼物·····	(303)

Glossary	
词汇表·····	(315)

第一部分 简介文化与交际

1. Culture and Human Behavior

文化与人类行为

Have you ever wondered what would happen to infants if they were isolated from the society right from their birth? Do you know how human beings would develop in a "culture-free" setting? You might draw some hints to these questions from the following article.

As used by *anthropologists*, culture means any human behavior that is learned rather than *genetically* transmitted. The South African bushman's method of hunting game, the Navajo's belief in certain medical ceremonies, and the middle-class American's high school senior *prom* are all elements of culture. All of the significant parts of a culture are passed on to different generations not through biological *heredity* but through "tradition" or social learning. From this standpoint, all human groups have a culture. Culture exists in agricultural as well as in industrialized societies. Culture is not nec-

essarily high or low; it exists in any type or stage of civilization. Ideally, culture is satisfying to both the individual member and the society to which he or she belongs. There are many types of culture, as well as an infinite variety of cultural elements. The cultural patterns that are typical of a certain group communicate the essence of that group. Culture distinguishes one group of people from another.

Culture is necessary for the survival and existence of human beings as human beings. Practically everything humans know, think, value, feel, and do is learned through participation in a sociocultural system. The few well-documented cases of children who are isolated from society in their early years support this statement. One of these cases, that of the "wild boy of Aveyron," is of exceptional interest. In 1799, a boy of about twelve was found in a forest near Aveyron, France. He was brought to Paris, where he attracted huge crowds who expected to see the "noble savage" of romantic eighteenth century philosophy¹. Instead they found a boy whose eyes were unsteady, expressionless, wandering vaguely from one object to another...they were so little trained by the sense of touch, they could never distinguish an object in relief² from one in a picture. His hearing was insensible to the loudest noises and to music. His voice was reduced to a state of complete muteness and only a *guttural* sound escaped him...he was equally indifferent to the odor of perfume and the terrible exhalation of the dirt with which his bed was filled...His touch was restricted to the mechanical grasping of an object...He had a tendency to trot and gallop...and an obstinate habit of smelling at anything given to him...he chewed like a rodent with a sudden action of the incisors³...and showed no sensitivity to cold or heat and

could seize hot coals from the fire without *flinching* or lay half naked upon the wet ground for hours in the wintertime...He was incapable of attention and spent his time rocking *apathetically* backwards and forwards like the animals in the zoo.

This description of the wild boy of Aveyron is provided by Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard, a young psychologist who undertook the education of the boy, whom he called Victor. He believed that Victor appeared subnormal not because of mental disease or *retardation* but because Victor had not participated in normal human society.

There is another case of children growing up apart from human society that also makes fascinating reading, although this case is not as well documented as that of the wild boy. Its meaning is the same, however: Participation in human culture is necessary for the development of human characteristics. In the province of Midnapore in India, the director of an orphanage was told by local villagers that there were "ghosts" in the forest. Upon investigating, the director found that two children, one about eight years old and the other about six years old, appeared to have been living with a pack of wolves in the forest. These children, part of a wolf pack with two *cubs*, were the ghosts described by the local people. In his diary, the director describes his first view of Kamala (as the older child was named) and Amala (the name given to the younger child):

Kamala was a *hideous* looking being... the head a big ball of something covering the shoulders and the upper portion of the *bust* ... Close at its heels there came another awful creature exactly like the first, but smaller in size. Their eyes were bright and piercing, unlike human eyes... They were covered with a peculiar kind of *sore*

all over the body. These sores...had developed from walking on all fours...They were very fond of raw meat and raw milk...They could not stand erect...they were able to move about a little, crawling on feet and hands... Gradually, as they got stronger, they commenced going on all fours, and afterwards began to run on all fours...just like squirrels.

Many of the other details in the orphanage director's diary about the "wolf-children" are similar to those told about Victor. The wolf children seemed to be continually looking for the cubs and the wolves with which they had been raised. They were shy and would not play with the other children in the orphanage. Even when the other children would laugh, play, or chat in their presence, the wolf-children would sit apathetically in a corner facing the wall, indifferent to all that was going on. While the other children were active during the day, the wolf children often slept, and at night they *prowled* around the orphanage, lapping up⁴ with their tongues the food and water left for them. They became friendly with only one child, a one-year-old who was just learning to crawl. But they must have sensed that he was different, because one day they bit and scratched him roughly. Apparently, without early human contact, human beings will not develop a "human nature" that allows them to feel comfortable with others of their species.

People have always been interested in how human beings would develop in a "culture-free" setting. Today it is considered immoral to isolate individuals at birth for experimental reasons, but such experimentation was attempted in the past. The Egyptian pharaoh⁵ Psammetichus tried to discover what language children would "natu-

rally" speak if they were reared where they could hear no human voice. He ordered two infants isolated from society and had them brought up without the sound of any human speech. He assumed that they would "naturally" talk in the language of their ancestors, and to his ears, their *babbling* sounded like Phrygian, an ancient Mediterranean tongue. In the fifteenth century, King James IV of Scotland tried a similar experiment and claimed his two infants spoke in Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament of the Bible⁶. Both monarchs were mistaken, of course. As the cases of Victor, the wild boy, and Kamala and Amala demonstrate, children learn human language in the same way they learn other kinds of human development by participation in a cultural community. They learn a specific human language as well as specific kinds of human behavior through their membership in a specific cultural community. The cases of Victor and the wolf-children make fascinating reading. But more important, they emphasize that we as human beings can only develop our human potential through growing up in close association with other human beings. Although culture restricts us to certain kinds of values, thoughts, and behavior, culture is also what allows us to develop our human qualities and abilities. The price that we pay for being human is that we become human in a culturally specific way.

Notes

1. ...the "noble savage" of romantic eighteenth century philosophy: 18 世纪浪漫哲学中的“高尚的原始人”。(这一哲学认为原始人比高度文明的人类更纯洁, 因此, 更高尚。)

2. in relief: 突出的

3. he chewed like a rodent with a sudden action of the incisors:
他像啮齿动物一样用门齿快速地咀嚼食物。rodent: 啮齿动物;
incisor: 门齿

4. lap up: 舔食, 贪婪地吃或喝

5. Egyptian pharaoh: 埃及法老

6. the language of the Old Testament of the Bible: 《圣经·旧约》所用的语言(希伯来语是《圣经·旧约》所用的语言。)

Comprehension Questions

1. What is culture according to this article?
2. Make a list of the cultural elements you can think of .
3. What have you learnt from the cases of the Aveyron wild boy and the wolf children?
4. How do people learn their native tongue?
5. How do you interpret the last sentence in the article?

Glossary

anthropologist	n.	人类学家
genetically	adv.	由基因引起地
prom	n.	[美口](中学生或大学生举行的) 班级舞会
heredity	n.	遗传
apathetically	adv.	漠然地
prowl	v.	徘徊(某地)
guttural	a.	粗哑的, 由喉间发出的
flinch	v.	缩回, 退却
hideous	a.	非常丑陋的
retardation	n.	延迟, 阻碍

sore	n.	(身体上的)痛处(如疮、溃疡等).
cub	n.	仔兽
bust	n.	胸部
babble	v.	咿呀学语

2. Culture and Its Components

文化及文化要素

Culture is pervasive; customs, beliefs, habits and computers are all parts of culture. This article focuses on the discussion of the nonmaterial components of culture: values, beliefs, norms...

The term culture, although usually taken for granted, has been defined in many ways. Howard defines it as the customary manner in which human groups learn to organize their behavior and thought in relationship to their environment. Haviland calls it a set of rules or standards shared by members of a society which when acted upon by the members, produces behavior that falls within a range that members consider proper and acceptable.

Anthropologists define culture as any human behavior that is

learned rather than genetically transmitted. They believe that culture is not necessarily high or low; it exists in any type or stage of civilization. In addition, the cultural patterns that are typical of a certain group communicate the essence of that group. Culture distinguishes one group of people from another. These and other definitions all point to the fact that culture is all *pervasive*, including not only customs and habits, ideas and beliefs but also the artifacts made by humans.

Culture has two major components; the material and nonmaterial. While the former refers to *tangible* items such as cars, watches, television sets, and houses, the latter is comprised of intangible elements such as values, beliefs and customs. Both the material and nonmaterial components of culture play a major role in influencing people's perceptions of reality, thought and behavior patterns.

The nonmaterial component of culture can be illustrated by the following examples: values, norms, beliefs, emotions, attitudes, *aspirations*, laws and symbols.

Culture shapes values, norms, emotions, beliefs, attitudes, aspirations, symbols, laws, perceptions and material possessions. In turn, these impact culture, which means that cultures are dynamic, always undergoing tremendous change. As individual and group qualities change either due to the internal process of growth and maturation or contact with outside groups, cultures also change. It is often possible to experience a case of culture lag where material components of a certain culture have changed, but the nonmaterial aspect lags behind¹. Computers and microwave ovens can be used to illustrate this point. While such items are in abundant supply, most

people, especially those of the older generation, do not easily welcome the idea of using them. These people need to reach a level of comfort whereby the items are perceived to be less threatening. Such a level comes about with knowledge acquisition and practice.

Values that characterize what is desirable are a significant part of culture. Very often, values of one cultural group may be in conflict with those of another. While individualism, competition and winning are core values of U.S. society, East Asian societies of China, Korea and Japan that are deeply rooted in Confucianism put *paramount* emphasis on proper social relationships and their maintenance². Emphasis on social relationships in Asia and on the individual in the United States produces different patterns of interpersonal and management styles. While the former are mostly preoccupied with³ personalized, interdependent relationships among employees, the latter spend a great deal of time focusing on equality, fairness and justice issues.

The value placed on time by the U.S. people, particularly those of Northern European descent, has often caused cultural misunderstandings not only with foreigners, but even with local subcultures such as the Navajo and those of Mexican and African descent. While the U.S. person of Northern European descent may be irritated by a Mexican arriving at 9 or 10 o'clock for an 8 o'clock party, the Mexican is dismayed over an invitation to a party which states in advance when it will be over. To the Mexican, this may indicate that such people do not know how to enjoy themselves. Some authors have observed that the Japanese often find the U.S. people too time-bound, driven by schedules and *deadlines*. This has prevented

an easy development of relationships between the two groups of business people.

There are advantages and disadvantages in both systems. While those who calculate time to the second and follow tight schedules may accomplish many tasks, they miss out on⁴ deep social relationships. The loneliness and pressure created by a strict time-observation may lead to health problems such as high blood pressure, depression, general fatigue, eating disorders and some forms of cancer. Those with loose schedules accomplish fewer tasks but may experience a greater sense of security, deep personal relationships, less loneliness and fewer incidents of diseases such as high blood pressure and depression.

Norms can be defined as rules that guide behavior. While some norms are proscriptive, stating what must not be done, others are prescriptive, stressing what must be done⁵. As Haviland points out, standards that define what is "normal" are determined by the culture itself. The Aymara of the Bolivian Andes⁶, for example, prohibit suicide, except in cases where an individual may be possessed by spirits of the dead⁷, which cannot be *exorcised*. Given this type of *affliction*, suicide is considered to be a reasonable alternative. It is important to note that culturally-induced conflicts not only can produce psychosis but can determine the type of psychosis as well. In a culture that encourages aggressiveness and suspicion, the crazy person is the one who is passive and trusting.

Beliefs which directly or indirectly dictate what is right or wrong also differ from one culture to another. While the Higgi of Nigeria believe that receiving anything with a left hand is sign of bad manners, among the U.S. people, one needs to carefully monitor

the use of particular fingers lest they should offend anyone. While non-Christian Japanese celebrate Christmas because the occasion symbolizes spiritual renewal to welcome a *savior*. While the U.S. people believe in freedom of the press, speech, and association, the Chinese people value *kin* ties and cooperation above everything else. For the Chinese, mutual dependence is the essence of all personal relationships, whereby compliance and subordination of one's will to that of the family and kin are of paramount importance⁸.

Beliefs are at the core of forming particular world views. The "rugged individualism" concept that is prevalent in the U.S. may not be well-regarded in Mexico even though they believe in "individuality". The U.S. people regard the individual as the center of attention, with ability to achieve anything through hard work. Anything that would get in the way of the individual's freedom to think, judge, and make decisions about how to live his or her life is not only morally wrong, but *sacrilegious*. Mexicans, on the other hand, believe in the uniqueness of each individual, not so much as evident through actions and achievements, but through a person's inner qualities or soul (*alma* or *espíritu*). While the U.S. people might feel uncomfortable about using a word such as "soul" to describe an individual because it is regarded as too personal, the Mexicans might interpret the U.S. emphasis on objective words and rationality as display of insensitive behavior. The Mexican interpretation is based on their belief in an emotional world, involving power and love-hate relationships.

Emotions provide channels for self-expression. When and how to show emotion is very much regulated by culture. In the majority of cultures around the world, females are less restrained from show-

ing emotion than males. However, even with such a generalization, cultures differ tremendously in how emotion is expressed. While it is not uncommon to meet young people on a U.S. college campus kissing and passionately involved with each other in a romantic fashion, such behavior is scorned or even considered taboo by Japanese, Africans, and Arabs. Even holding hands with someone of the opposite sex in public is considered impolite. Parents of such young people would be blamed for raising them without proper instructions.

Culture can also be expressed in terms of **attitudes** that people have toward life in general or some aspects of it. A futuristic attitude which is so typical of U.S. people is not common in other societies. One often hears a statement like, "See you tomorrow," while other people would say, "See you tomorrow, if God wishes." The former case shows a group of people who seem to have a handle on life and can almost predict with certainty that tomorrow will be here. In the latter case, events are usually left in the domain of a superior power, God. These kinds of attitudes definitely impact people's actions.

Aspirations which affect the goals that we design for ourselves and our perceptions of the world around us are related to attitudes. If a culture stresses friendship and cooperation, a stranger will be taken care of with great kindness and hospitality. On the other hand, if the culture emphasizes competition and individualism, a stranger will be looked upon with suspicion and sometimes open hostility and aggression.

Laws are also a major component of culture. What might be taken as social custom in one culture, may be law in another.