冷眼看西方英语阅读丛书之三

Infotopia
信 息 天 国

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【内容简介】 未来的因特网将带领人类进入信息理想国，入乡随俗的外国留日学生，网上寻根及编写家谱的秘诀，莫名其妙地与外星人联系在一起而出名的美国小城，一位身居异乡他国、年仅 8 岁的幼童所做出的理性选择，一位热情的女权主义者的奋斗与抗争给人们带来的思考，悲观主义情绪笼罩一代美国人，何以把握失去的艺术，瑞士银行隐藏纳粹战利品之谜。几十个妙趣横生的话题将吸引你忘掉学习英语的苦恼，从而使你陶醉在使用英语的快乐之中。

前　言

　　即便是对语言研究者来说，语言也似乎永远是个难以讲清的问题。一两岁的婴儿就可以运用这个工具表达自己的喜怒哀乐。母语的获得如此迅猛与完美，真让人惊诧不已。但一说到学外语，不少人就少了这种轻松的感觉。怎么学？学什么？诸如此类的问题让老师们争论不已、论文连篇，同时又让很多学习者丧失信心、失望灰心。

　　其实，问题很简单。学一种语言最好的办法就是去和以这种语言为母语的人们生活在一起，这样学习者就具备了近似于学母语的那种环境。但不幸的是，我们的大多数学习者都不敢有此奢望。很多人获得外语知识的来源仅限于课本和四六级模拟题。这让人联想到经济学中的 input 和 output。以我对语言的体会，input 可以来自老师在课堂上的 formal instruction，但更多地来自于学习者本人从不同渠道获得的 language exposure，接触和使用语言的机会。本书的目的就想体现这一点。

　　可以说，这本书的最终目的是给学习者一个新的思路。英语学习可以是件轻松愉快的事情。语言与文化密不可分，语言只是个工具，是个载体。

　　本书的书名是《信息天国》。信息时代，语言如生活，变得更加丰富多彩，所以本书的选材无法刻板僵硬；信息时代，很多东西瞬息万变，语言不再停滞不前，所以本书的内容也无法单调肤浅。

　　希望广大读者朋友们迈入信息天国，找到一种如沐春风的感觉。

石　兰

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Unit 1

Infotopia

信息天国

因特网在全世界范围的迅速普及世人有目共睹，头脑灵活的商人也瞄准了这块尚未开发的宝地，大量广告铺天盖地般涌入因特网。人们不禁怀疑：因特网究竟是如它的发明者所设想的信息天国，还是已变成了兜售商品的超级市场？

A current conceit says that Internet time must be calculated in dog years. The pace of change is so fast that one year on the Internet is like seven years in any other medium. By this scheme, it has been nearly a century since the Internet was born. It has been 14 years since the emergence of the World Wide Web as an electronic-publishing vehicle. And by the year 2000, the Internet will have undergone

another two decades' worth of growth and development.

Every step has aroused great expectations. Some thought it would lead in an era of cooperation, as both work and play became digitalized. Others saw the "citizen-controlled" Internet as a radical challenge to establishment control of information outlets, or as a civic marketplace. In his book "Life After Television", theorist George Gilder says the networked personal computer will transform capitalism into "a healing force in the present crisis of home and family, culture and community".

But today the Internet itself is being transformed into something closer to a marketplace. Advertisements and sales booklets are increasing among the Webzines and newsgroups and bulletin boards. "Cyberstores" offer everything from music CDs to certificates of deposit. The most interesting new technologies are those that foster transactions. As the salesmen and the marketers crowd their way into the bitstream, is the Internet on the verge of becoming just one more mass commercial medium? Does anything remain of the original Infotopia?

It is almost an obviously true statement that no new communications medium turns out the way its inventors imagined. The developers of the Bell System thought of the telephone as a business tool; they were both surprised and appalled when their customers changed to the "trivial" purpose of social conversation. The radio was meant to be a wireless telegraph, a medium of two-way messaging; none of its creators anticipated broadcasting and mass programming. Television began as radio with pictures; early programs were actually simulcasts, video transmissions of a radio program on a radio set with a radio audience . It took
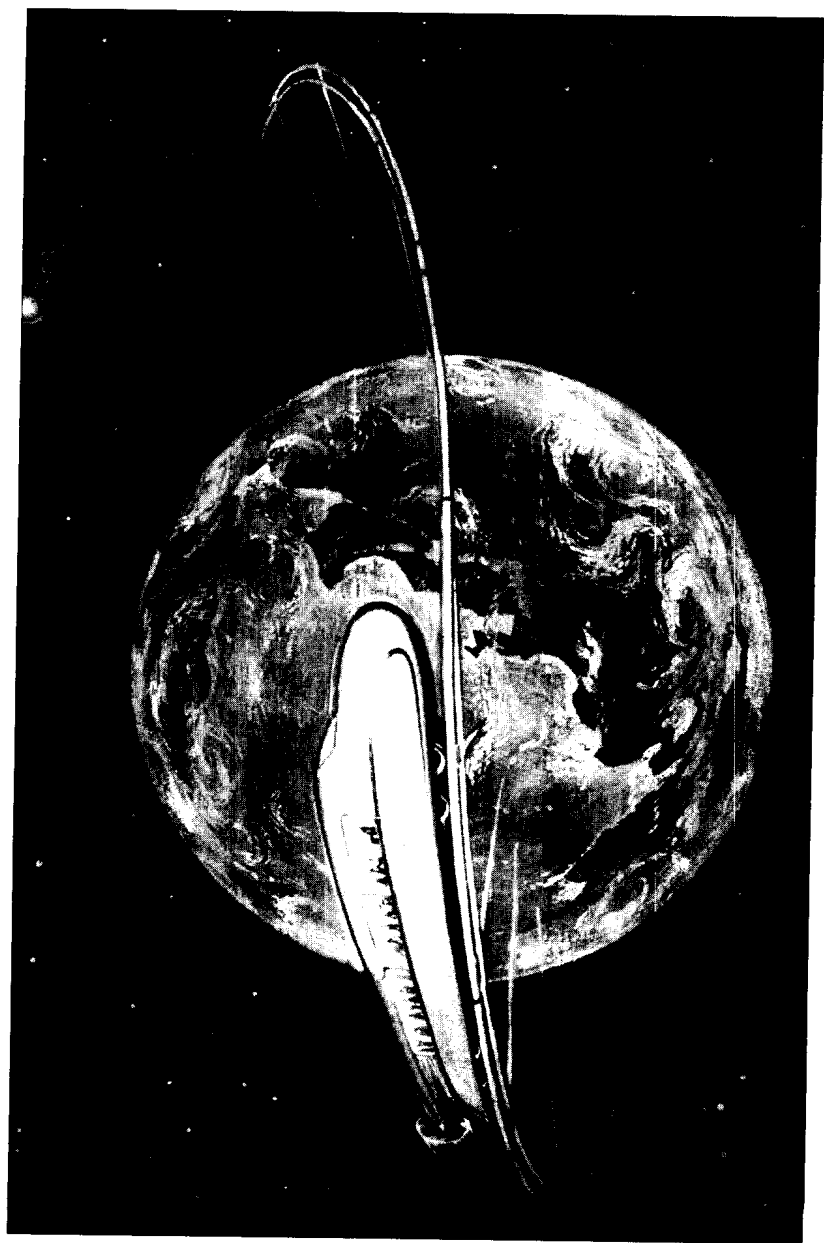
years for broadcasters to discover television as a medium with its own unique properties and powers.

So it is with the Internet. The original goal, in the 1960s, was a sharing of resources. The founders of network computing wanted researchers at Stanford to be able to use software on a machine at MIT, even where the two computers had incompatible operating systems. From there it was a short step to exchanges of messages and documents—the origin of e-mail. Soon the Internet became a reference medium, where research papers could be read by anyone on the network. It was the World Wide Web that brought the Internet into the consumer marketplace. Developed in 1990 as a system for delivering graphics-rich, page-like file over conventional telephone lines using Internet technology, the Web lured traditional news and entertainment companies into electronic-publishing ventures. The potential audience was vast: by the end of 1996, according to Jupiter Communications, a New York-based research-and-consulting firm, more than 15 million North American households had some form of online access. In the year 2000, the projection is that North America will have 38 million online households—more than one third of all households, most of them affluent.

But a funny thing happened on the way to Infotopia. The costs of electronic publication proved higher than expected and the receipts turned out to be negligible. The Web is awash in information, much of it created by small start-up companies, and the competition has made it difficult for traditional media companies to charge for access to their Web sites. Besides, many of the early Internet users were sincere believers in the proposition that

all information should be free, and that attitude still lingers. The result is that the Web is a marketplace of violent price resistance. Last September The Wall Street Junrnal, for example, began charging a subscription fee of $49 a year for its online edition ($29 for subscribers to the printed newspaper) and saw a dramatic decline in its Web readership. Even Slate, Microsoft's political Webzine, gave up its plans to sell subscriptions.

At the same time, advertising has failed to take up the slack. Despite the attractive demographics of online households, the Web is not yet a mass medium. Advertisers are suspicious of the Web, too, because its interactive qualities make it easy for consumers simply to bypass an ad. They are also uncomfortable with audience measurement in the new medium; the industry has yet non-standard comparable to those used in print, radio and television. As reality sets in, many Website operators are scaling back expectations. Microsoft officials admitted recently that they expect to lose millions of dollars a year on MSNBC for at least the next four years.

But on another front, Web technology fosters business. The same interactive function that makes advertisers nervous leads to a new kind of marketing — the transactional advertisement. An example of this is a Web-based service called Auto-By-Tel, which allows prospective buyers to search for information about car models that match their preferences, then sends their names to the appropriate dealers near them. The dealers pay for the service and in return get qualified leads that would cost them far more to acquire through conventional means. In the case of small

consumer goods that customers don't feel they need to inspect before purchase, the software can actually complete the sale for home delivery. The amazon. com Web site has created a successful market by selling books. The model is essentially mail-order retailing.

With the development of secure transmissions of credit information — Visa and MasterCard are jointly testing a system planned for introduction by early 1998—transactions will play an increasingly large part in Internet activity. The Web is particularly effective at selling services backed by research, such as discount stock trading, an area with several successful sites already, including e. Schwab and a Web-only company called E' Trade. Financial services generally lend themselves to Web marketing, as do travel services, because the transactions can be supported by extensive computer databases of useful information. And every month sees the introduction of new software to automate transactions.

The latest adaptation of Web technology is for business-to-business marketing. This is done through "extranets", extensions of a company's private, internal network (or intranet) to corporate customers and suppliers. Extranets are a hot subject for companies like Netscape, the creator of the most widely used Web browser, and America Online, the country's largest commercial online service. An example of an apparently successful extranet is the one built by General Electric to sell machine and appliance parts to its customers; GE was expecting 1996 online sales of about $1 billion.

With such a hurry of activity, it's easy to imagine that com-

merce will soon drown information on the Internet. That won't necessarily happen, but almost certainly the Web will contain a rising tide of information subsidized in some way by commercial activity. Advertising has always underwritten the largest share of most media companies' costs. The question is whether Web advertising will ever reach a volume that can support large investments in reporting news, building deep information databases and creating new entertainment. Many analysts believe the critical mass to be about 30 million households, which suggests that the Web will become a true mass medium about the year 2000. Nicholas Negroponte, founder of the cutting-edge MIT Media Lab and author of "Being Digital", argues that the Web by its very nature may be too personalized ever to be a mass medium, but he believes that business may flourish there anyway, with advertising targeted to small markets or even individual customers.

This confusion of the line between "editorial" content and advertising is precisely what worries most traditional publishers. The Web is already flooded with "information" sites that are centers of partisan pleading and crackpot theories as facts. In an environment without many of the traditional markers of high-quality content, how is the unlucky consumer to tell the difference? The answer is, once again, a commercial one: brand names. As the Web expands and the number of "publishers" grows, brand names that are known and trusted will become progressively more important. Everything on the Web is ultimately about trust, says Negroponte. "We trust brands, rightly or wrongly. We trust friends... And we trust our own

experience, which may be the most faulty of the lot. I have these same three choices in cyberspace. "

In the dog years to come, cyberspace will continue its transformations. We can expect a rash of new "non-PC devices", such as Internet TVs and Internet telephones. The Internet TV in particular is a promising device, is only because it would benefit from the growing market in Web-based videogames—likely to be a hot area itself by the year 2000, as new video-compression techniques increase the realism of online game-playing. Business, too, will continue to thrive, especially in the area of consumer purchases, which will benefit from the development of electronic cash and "smart" cards that allow for "micropayments" of as little as 25 cents. We can also expect that business activities will enable further inroads into personal privacy, as customers willingly put more and more of their spending and consumption patterns into databases. Is that a troubling prospect? It depends on our Web sites' sincerity about bringing them into action. As Negroponte says, everything on the Web is ultimately about trust.

New Words

1. conceit   [kən'si:t] *n.*   诙谐或机智的思想或辞句
2. reckon   ['rekən] *v.*   计算
3. digitalize   ['didʒitəlaiz] *v.*   数字化
4. bitstream [bit'stri:m] *n.* 位流(一种同步传输和以此方式操作的装置)
5. Infotopia   信息理想国,由 Information(信息)和 Utopia(乌托邦,即理想国)两词合成

6. simulcast ['siməlkɑːst] n. 无线电和电视同时播出的节目

7. incompatible [ˌinkəm'pætəbl] a. 不合谐的，不兼容的

8. lure [luə] v. 引诱，吸引

9. affluent ['æfluənt] a. 丰富的

10. subscription [səb'skripʃn] n. 订阅

11. slack [slæk] n. 松弛的部分

12. demographics [ˌdemə'græfiks] n. 人口统计

13. scale(back) [skeil] v. 减少

14. foster ['fɔstə] v. 培养，养育

15. retail ['riːteil] v. 零售（货物）

16. transaction [træn'zækʃn] n. 交易

17. antomate ['ɔːtəmeit] v. 使自动化

18. browser ['brauzə] n. 浏览器

19. subsidize ['sʌbsidaiz] v. 给予补助金，资助，奖助

20. underwrite [ˌʌndə'rait] v. 承但全部或部分损失

21. partisan [ˌpɑːti'zæn] a. 盲目推崇的

22. crackpot ['krækpɔt] a. 狂想的，怪念头的

23. cyberspace 电脑化空间

24. niche [nitʃ] n. 适当的位置，恰当的场所

25. encryption [in'kripʃən] n. 加密

Reading Comprehension

1. With what topic is the passage primarily concerned?

   A. Marketplace in the future.

   B. Internet.

   C. World Wide Web.

   D. The future of computer.

2. In paragraph 1, the phrase "in dog years" means _____ .

A. a very long time   B. a very long life

C. the time of a doy's life   D. seven years

3. "It" in the second sentence of paragraph 2, may refer to

    _____.

A. every step   B. expectation

C. internet   D. none of the above

4. Paragraph 3 states that the Internet today is more like

    _____.

A. a communication vehicle

B. a radical challenge to establishment control

C. a healing force in today's crisis

D. a marketplace

5. According to paragraph 5, _____ brought the Internet into

   the consumer marketplace.

A. high technology

B. the inventor of computer

C. World Wide Web

D. none of the above

6. As is stated in the passage, the Web is particularly effective

   at _____.

A. selling services   B. education

C. medical care   D. none of the above

7. The passage says that it is through _____ to corporate cus-

   tomers and suppliers.

A. intranet   B. extranets

C. network   D. none of the above

8. The passage clearly states that the Web is underway to be-

   come _____.

A. a true marketplace

B. a true sharing of resources

C. a true mass medium

D. none of the above

9. We may understand from the passage that, as the Web expands and the number of "publishers" grows, _____ will become more and more important.

A. quality of ads   B. quality of goods

C. fame of internet   D. brand name

10. The last paragraph seems to say that everything on the Web is ultimately about _____.

A. widespread degree   B. development

C. trust   D. None of the above

A Disaster on the Headset
耳机所带来的灾难

    网上购物是一种新兴、便捷的购物方式。但它是否真如人们所预期的那样方便有效？其商品质量能否得到保障呢？请看看它给一位做室内装璜的女士惹的麻烦。

    A new Internet technology ran into trouble today when a Los Angeles' woman filed a $10 million damage suit against a textile manufacturer, charging she had lost a high-prestige job as an interior designer because of household decorations the company sold her through the World Wide Web. The technology,

which is called VirtualTouch, lets prospective buyers examine fabrics as though they were in a showroom — allowing them to "feel" the fabric with a virtual-reality headset linked to the VirtualTouch Web site by satellite.

"I felt the cloth — it was a magnificent raw silk and just the right color." said Valerie Pendleton, the designer hired by the stylish Hollywood restaurant Black. "But when it arrived, it tore easily and showed even the slightest water stains. It was a disaster." Said Bruno Mellon, one of the restaurant's owners, "When we found out we were out $ 35,000 on the fabric alone, we fired her." Pendleton said her reputation was irretrievably damaged by the firing.

"It seemed like a good idea." said Pendleton. "You subscribe to this service, and they send you the headset. Then you 'touch' one fabric after another, and when you find one you like you press this button on the headset, and it places the order. It made everything so simple. Who has time to go to showrooms anymore? It takes every spare moment just to wait for downloads to these damn headsets."

New Words

1. prospective [prə'spektiv] *a.*   预期的,未来的
2. irretrievably [ˌiri'triːvəbli] *ad.*   不可挽回地
3. download [daunləud] *v.*   下载(网络用语)

Unit 2

Do As the Romans Do

入乡随俗

在日本留学并不容易,首先住的问题就难以解决。市内的租金太昂贵,郊外又不方便,还有的户主因语言差异不接受外国人。有的人就只好长期住旅馆。习惯上的差异往往使住户与户主的关系变得紧张,⋯⋯所以最好的方法是启程前先去咨询在日本留过学的朋友。

Jim Wu: The warning a senior of mine gave me before I came to Japan, that finding an apartment is difficult, turned out to be very accurate.

Kim Hae Young: Usually, one needs a guarantor to get an apartment. The school principal acts as guarantor for us, which is very helpful. The other problem is language. I didn't speak any Japanese when I