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北京大学试用教材

英语

(文科)

北京大学公共英语教研室 陈瑞兰 沈一鸣 编

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编 者 的 话

《英语》(文科)第五册选编的文章均系原著。课文内容涉及到政治、经济、法律、历史以及文学作品等有关文科的主要方面,目的在于提高文科学生借助词典直接阅读原文报刊及专业书籍的水平,并培养学习者通过参照原文写作一般性文摘的能力。本册侧重于词汇的词义和用法以及习惯语的用法,没有专门讲述语法的部分。学习者应注意运用已学过的语法知识对课文中出现的一些较难的语法现象进行分析,并应注意根据上下文统观全文,以达到正确理解原文中心内容的目的。

本册部分课文素材由邵伯栋同志提供,全书由王岷源教授审阅,谨在此表示感谢。

由于编者水平有限,时间仓促,不当之处,敬请读者指正。

陈瑞兰 沈一鸣

1983年11月

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Lesson One

On Reading Too Fast

It is impossible to read too well, but, alas! it is only too easy nowadays to read too fast.

For a great many people reading has passed from being a conscious into being an instinctive activity. We can no longer control it. We become passive rather than active readers. We cannot stop or even put on some kind of brake. We are reading machines, always wound up and going. Faced with an advertisement of somebody's pills in which we are not in the least interested, we are aware of sunlight and shadow. We do not see an advertisement as a lot of marks which, if we examine them, will prove to be words conveying a message to us. We get the message whether we want it or not. We have no longer need to spell out the letters—whole words, whole sentences throw themselves at us. Looking at a green field as we pass it in the train, we have no choice whether we shall or shall not read the enormous letters on a pink or yellow board telling us something we do not want to know. We have no sooner noticed that board than we have read it. We have come to read as naturally as we breathe, and the only way in which to stop our eyes from reading is to close them

or to direct them where there is no print.

A journey, whether by rail or road, is enough to make us envy the inhabitants of illiterate countries, where it is not worth while to advertise goods except over the shops where they are actually to be sold. In places where most of the people cannot read and have to sign their names with a cross, the cobbler hangs out a wooden boot, the baker an elaborate scroll of bread, the glover a gilded glove, and the watchmaker a wooden clock-face on which time stands still. No words are wasted. In such countries there is no inducement to advertisers to plant boards of rhetoric in green fields. What would be the good of setting up the graven image of a beefsteak on the broad plain without the means of conveying to those who saw it where this desirable dish was to be had? You hang up your wooden beefsteak where you are prepared to serve its juicy prototype, but you do not force the contemplation of it on strangers a hundred miles away. In England where all can read, all are vulnerable. The advertiser can tell the traveller passing through Yorkshire where to buy beefsteaks in London. He has only to attract our eyes to his print to get it read. It is a melancholy thought that if only reading were a good deal more difficult we should be spared the sight of those horrible pages twenty feet high beside a country road telling us that we should be welcome somewhere we do not want to go.

The Education Acts are, I suppose, primarily to blame, but

after them the modern development of the newspaper which they made possible. There was a time when a newspaper was a hand-written letter of gossip which, when it came from town, would suffice a countryside for a fortnight. Then it became a printed folio sheet. Today, spread out, it is as big as a blanket, and we get a new one twice a day. It is only when a newspaper is a rarity that it gets read in full. Coming across an odd copy when in foreign parts, I have read the whole of it, even the advertisements, and found some assuagement of my home-sickness in learning that, if I had been in England two months before, I could have had a chance of buying "a new semi., 4 beds., 2 ent., kit., scul., gdns., rm., gar., el. pwr.," by applying to a letter and a number "c/o M/c Guard." In such circumstances even these cryptograms became romantic literature. (I have enough Welsh blood in me to be able to pronounce them as they stand.) But normally, in England, people do not read the whole paper. There is too much of it. Instead they have by practice learnt to look through it in such a way that they can be confident that nothing of interest to themselves has escaped them. Professional journalists look through as many as a dozen papers in an hour or so, and when they have done it they know very well what there is in each. But even the man who runs through one paper only, between his breakfast and his work, performs a feat at once astonishing and sad: astonishing because of the large area of printed matter which he succeeds in surveying, and

sad because the habit he acquires of thus surveying print grows upon him until at last he finds it difficult to read in any other way.

Once upon a time everybody recognized that print was a form of frozen sound, and reading was then a form of listening. Today, with our over-developed ocular skill, we see a sentence, even a paragraph, at a glance and hear nothing at all. We read so fast that if our reading were still listening we should be hearing every word in that sentence or paragraph at once, or so nearly simultaneously that all the sounds would be telescoped together. Even if we heard them in their right order it would be like listening to a gramophone record spinning at some thousands of revolutions a minute. We should put our fingers in our ears to save them from so horrible a noise.

Reading by sight is good enough for bad writing and too good for some advertisements. But the trouble is that when we come to good writing it is difficult to restrain our eyes and give our ears a chance. It is hardest for those who have read voraciously in youth. Long before they have reached middle age, even if they neglect newspapers, they have acquired a habit of galloping through books, and become aware that, though, perhaps, they read more than ever, they get less from their reading than they did. They look enviously at the man (rarer every day) who reads slowly, his mouth forming the words. It will take him a week to read what they will read in a couple of hours, but there is not the satisfaction in a

week of their reading that there is in a couple of hours of his. I always suspect that this is what Hazlitt meant when he said that he never read a book through after he was thirty. I find that I have to make a continuous effort to read a good book as it should be read and to prevent my eyes from taking in too much of a page at once. Poetry lessens the effort, because the manner of its printing is a reminder that it is not to be read by eye alone. Prose gives no such repeated warning. No white lines hint that we should do well to have a foot on the brake. We eat up the columns like the miles on an arterial road.

I hardly know what is to be done about it, beyond deliberately trying to read as if we had only lately learnt our letters. But one or two observations do seem to suggest a possible though inconvenient remedy. I have long forgotten the little Greek that once carried me through set pages of Thucydides, but I find that a Russian book has a fair chance of being properly read by me. The Russian characters are just enough to prevent me from reading too much at a glance. Although the French use type not much unlike ours I think I come nearer to real reading when I open a French book than when I open an English one. There is just enough strangeness to delay the galloping eye and to give the ear its opportunity. In the same way I relish a book printed before the long "s" went out of fashion, partly because that unfamiliar letter ever so slightly holds me back. And it occurs to me

that here is the best of all arguments in favour of simplified spelling (not in newspapers, but elsewhere). Those who urge simplification of spelling assume that whatever spelling is adopted will be uniform and that it will make reading easier even than it is. I see a faint hope that it might be used to make it more difficult. If every man spells for himself, as once upon a time he did, and if he spells the same word differently in different places as once upon a time it was no reproach to him, we shall again be reading letter by letter, forming the words, listening to catch the sound of them. Sound once again will be the medium, not sight, and good books will be able to count on good readers.

(By Arthur Ransome)

Glossary

The meanings given below are those which the words and phrases have as they occur in the text.

1. conscious: (of actions, feelings, etc.) realized by oneself.
2. instinctive: based on the natural tendency to behave in a certain way without reasoning or training.
3. brake: apparatus that can be pressed against a wheel to reduce the speed of a bicycle, motor-car, train, etc.
4. always wound up and going: always having the spring tightened and working.

5. (not) in the least: (not) in the smallest degree.
6. envy: feel discontent and ill-will (at another's better fortune).
7. illiterate: with little or no education: unable to read or write.
8. elaborate: carefully prepared and finished.
9. gild: cover with gold-coloured paint.
10. inducement: something which leads or causes (sb. to do sth.).
11. rhetoric: language with much display and ornamentation (often with the implication of insincerity and exaggeration).
12. serve: attend to (customers in a shop, etc.).
13. prototype: first or original example from which others have been or will be copied or developed.
14. vulnerable: not protected against attack.
15. Yorkshire: county north of England bordering on North Sea.
16. melancholy: sad.
17. spare: relieve of the necessity of doing or undergoing something.
18. the Education Acts: the formal product of a legislative body concerning the education of the people of Britain.
19. gossip: a rumor or report of an intimate nature.
20. suffice: be enough for.
21. folio sheet: a sheet of printed paper folded once.
22. come across: find or meet by chance.

23. foreign parts: foreign district (not in one's own country).
24. assuagement: that which make (pain, suffering, feelings, desire) less.
25. home-sickness: feeling of sadness because away from home.
26. semi.: semi-detached house.
27. beds.: bedrooms.
28. ent.: entrance.
29. kit.: kitchen.
30. scul.: scullery.
31. gdns.: gardens.
32. rm.: room.
33. gar.: garage.
34. el. pwr.: electric power.
35. c/o M/c Guard.: care of *Manchester Guardian* (name of a famous newspaper, now called *Guardian*).
36. cryptogram: figure or representation having a hidden significance.
37. survey: to view comprehensively.
38. ocular: of the eyes.
39. telescope: make shorter by means of sections that slide one within the other.
40. gramophone: (=U.S.A. phonograph) machine for reproducing music and speech recorded on flat disks.
41. spin: move round rapidly.
42. revolution: complete turn of a wheel, etc.

43. restrain: keep under control.
44. voraciously: greedily.
45. gallop: hurry.
46. suspect: have an idea or feeling.
47. Hazlitt: William, 1778–1830, English essayist.
48. arterial: designating a main road with many branches.
49. remedy: something that corrects an evil.
50. set pages: pages with arranged type of printing.
51. Thucydides: [θuːˈsɪdədiːz, 471?–?400 B. C., Greek historian.
52. go out of fashion: become not admired and imitated during a period or at a place (of clothes, behaviour, thought, custom, etc.).
53. in favour of: on the side of.
54. medium: that by which sth. is done.

Aids to Study

1. Arthur Ransome (1884–d.?), British writer. His works include *“Portraits and Speculations”*, *“Lenin: the Man and His Work.”*
2. There is ellipsis in the sentence: For a great many people reading has passed from being a conscious (activity) into being an instinctive activity.
3. Faced with an advertisement...we are aware of sunlight and shadow.

We are aware of sunlight and shadow because we do not

concentrate our attention upon the advertisement.

4. We get the message whether we want it or not.

We take in what the advertisement says at a glance whether we want to get the message or not.

5. There is ellipsis in the sentence:...the baker (hangs out)... the glover (hangs out)...and the watchmaker (hangs out)...
6. What would be the good...where this desirable dish was to be had?

In the phrase, "without the means of conveying to those who saw it where this desirable dish was to be had", "where this desirable dish was to be had" is the object clause of the gerund "conveying" and "to those who saw it" serves as the indirect object of "conveying."

7. The Education Acts are...which they made possible.

(1) The Education Acts are to blame because they make everybody learn to read. Notice that "be to blame" means "deserve censure", the active form of the infinitive being the idiomatic usage instead of "be to be blamed."

(2) There is ellipsis here:...but after them the modern development of the newspaper which they made possible (is to blame). The Education Acts made the development of newspaper possible, so the development of newspaper is to blame after the Education Acts.

8. There was a time when a newspaper was...for a fortnight.

Here "a time" means "a period of time associated with a certain event, etc." The when-clause tells you that it was a long time ago when there was no print. And "would suffice a countryside for a fortnight" means that the countryside people would read the hand-written letter of gossip one after another for a fortnight.

9. Instead they have by practice...has escaped them.

The "that they can be confident..." is an adverbial clause of result. And there is usually an ellipsis in "they can be confident (of the fact) that nothing of interest to themselves has escaped."

10. But even the man...to read in any other way.

There is ellipsis here:...(it is) astonishing because... and (it is) sad because... In "the habit he acquires of thus surveying print" the relative pronoun "that or which" is omitted which stands for the object of "acquires", and "of thus surveying print" is the modifier of this omitted relative pronoun, which stands for "the habit."

11. Reading by sight...for some advertisements.

There is ellipsis here:...and (reading by sight is) too good for some advertisements. It means that some advertisements are not worth reading, so even reading by sight is too good for them.

12. ...but there is not the satisfaction in a week of their reading that there is in a couple of hours of his.

Here "that there is in a couple of hours of his" is a rela-

tive clause modifying “satisfaction”—there is satisfaction in a couple of hours of his (reading).

13. ...this is what Hazlitt meant when he said that he never read a book through after he was thirty.

Hazlitt meant that he never galloped through a book after he was thirty.

14. We eat up the columns like the miles on an arterial road. We eat up the columns like the signs of miles that stand on an arterial road which we pass in a hurry.

15. ...and to give the ear its opportunity.
...and to let the ear listen to the sound of reading in our mind.

Exercises

I. Answer the following questions:

1. Why is it impossible for a great many people to read too well nowadays?
2. Do we have a choice whether we shall or shall not read the advertisement when we pass it in a train? Why?
3. How do the inhabitants of illiterate countries sign their names and advertise their goods?
4. Why is it that in England all are vulnerable?
5. Why does the author have the thought that it would be better if only reading were a good deal more dif-