

READING BETWEEN THE LINES

—ANALYSIS AND APPRECIATION

字里行间 —— 英语短文分析与欣赏

■ 林景鸿 著

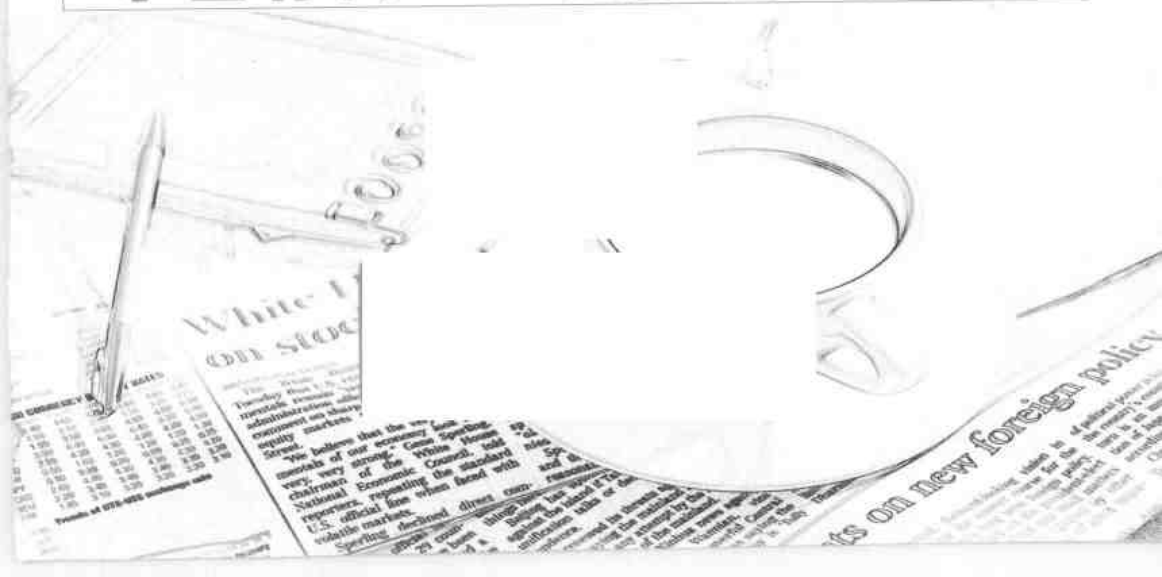
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Preface

Preface

Liu Yameng (刘亚猛)

Reading in general, as all experienced readers can attest to, could be a tricky, paradoxical and, indeed, risky business. Reading English as a foreign language is doubly so.

It is tricky, even treacherous, in large part because meaning is not something that resides in language or text waiting to be "discovered" and "retrieved". The process whereby the meaning of a text is *generated* is much more complicated than we tend to assume, so much so that nothing in the act of reading is, for all practical purposes, fixed. That is probably why no one has been able to come up with an "algorithm of reading" so far, one that would apply to all kinds of reading situations and, if only the reader had followed the procedure it prescribed, consistently produce the result of what may be called a "total comprehension" or "correct interpretation". That is also why no reading public within whatever language system can agree on a specific set of criteria by which to measure the success or failure of reading.

The paradoxical nature of reading manifests itself everywhere. The more we delve into a book or even a good essay, for exemplars, the less certain we feel about what it "actually" signifies. The better readers we become, the more hesitant we grow in making definitive pronouncements on what we have read. The greater number of questions we are able to ask about a text, the greater the skills we have developed in analyzing it.

And not unlike playing the stock market, the efforts and time we have "invested" in improving our reading proficiency do not always guarantee a proportional or even reasonable "yield". Despite the great importance we Chinese have been attaching to the betterment of our reading in English over the past decades, and a surge in availability of what pur-



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port to be the ultimate guides, models or theories of English reading, anecdotal evidence suggests that mechanical “information retrieval”, superficial analysis, uninformed interpretation, or even an utter “black-out” of the mind in the face of any truly challenging text is still the order of the day when it comes to the general readers’ *actual* performance in *real-life* reading situations. The ratio between input and output, cost and benefit, outlay and profit, is so incredibly high here as to make reading English one of the riskiest “businesses” in the domain of our intellectual pursuits.

To call attention to the risks involved in this endeavor, especially to those pitfalls, snags and vortexes likely to lie in wait for student readers, is not to discourage them from redoubling their efforts to gain maturity and sophistication as readers. Rather, it is to add a sense of urgency to their need to reflect more deeply on what reading is all about. Reading, for instance, can never be taken for a mere technique. It is rather an intellectual, social, cultural or even intercultural practice all at once. Proficiency in reading is not derivable from a finite body of knowledge which we can learn and master explicitly. It is *acquired* through our sustained and persistent engagement with texts. No instruction in reading, however good it may be, will be able to offer nostrums, secret formulae, cure-alls, etc. that could miraculously lift the students to a high level of competence in reading. Once we have embraced assumptions such as the above-mentioned, and become cognizant of their implications for learning and teaching reading, it will be time to try something new: to introduce a more sophisticated theoretical framework, for instance, or to adopt an innovative approach that promises to make a difference in what we have been doing, as Professor Lin Jinghong has done with the timely publication of his book *Reading Between the Lines*.

Unlike the run-of-mill stuff for similar purposes, *Reading Between the Lines* shuns many of the must-have topics in a conventional treatment of the subject (e. g., skimming, scanning, identifying key words and topic sentences). Instead, it zeros in on what differentiates an uninitiat-

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ed reader from a competent one and hence that which holds the key to true sophistication in reading, i. e. , the ability to penetrate the textual surface, to go beyond the obvious, and to *reconstruct* the implicated meaning *with justification*. Since an inability to “read between the lines” of native texts has long been a major bottleneck in Chinese students’ learning of English, by focusing on this topic, Professor Lin directs our attention to what doubles as the most crucial and the weakest link in the “chain” of English reading and learning in general.

The format of the book renders abundantly clear another of its welcome innovations. Rather than adopting the authoritative tone of a “law-giver” in this field, dictating as inviolable rules generalization after generalization on the “what” and the “how” of reading, Professor Lin is content with playing the humbler and arguably more effective role as a *challenger* and a *facilitator*. The task he sets for himself is as simple as it is productive: to challenge his readers to develop their own proficiency through serious personal attempts to read between the lines. To this end, he sets up all the needed “scaffolds” and creates the best possible conditions for his readers to “do it themselves”. For example, he selects some of the most engaging, interesting and compact reading materials, whose “bite size” encourages and expedites close, deep, thorough, and thoughtful reading. The all-important “Appreciation and Discussion” sections throughout the book are consistently structured in such a manner as to suggest to the readers, in a tone that is the most unobtrusive imaginable, “How about trying to approach the text this way? Here are the reasons for the interpretation I am proposing.” Even in the framing “Introduction” to each chapter, the author refrains from launching a heavy-handed, jargon-filled treatise on how to process written texts, and proceeds instead to provide just enough theoretical insights for handling the task of helping the readers to draw from *their own* practices and experiences in reading.

Well-versed as he is in contemporary linguistic and reading theories, Professor Lin resists the temptation to turn his book into an overtly

and overly theory-intensive discussion on implied meanings in a text. As a senior teacher-cum-scholar in the profession of foreign language teaching and research, he has been concerned about a widening gap between the accessible and practically oriented kind of theoretical guidance, which today's teachers and students of English need badly, and the kind of theorization at a very high level of abstraction which scholarly journals and presses are turning out in volumes. The growing bifurcation between pedagogical imperatives and theoretical interests in foreign language pedagogy and studies in China worries him a lot, and with the methodological choice he has made in writing the book, he shows that one does not have to make a choice between the two. In a discussion that is *informed* rather than *showy* theoretically, as he has offered in the book, they could be seamlessly and fruitfully reunited. Many more theoretical insights than those he refers to explicitly have gone into the design and the making of this book. It is up to those of us with a "vested interest" in "theory stuff" to ferret them out, through none other means than, why, "reading between the lines".

A useful book for all serious students, professional teachers, and pedagogical specialists of English alike, a valuable contribution to scholarly inquiries into reading and interpretation as a significant theoretical subject, and a pleasure to read, *Reading Between the Lines* would reward all of us who have the good sense to take it up and start perusing it.

Part I . Read Between the Lines for Conversational Implicatures

Introduction: The Cooperative Principle, Maxims, and Conversational Implicatures

In everyday life, when we talk we generally have something like an unwritten agreement or the cooperative principle in our mind to guide us—saying things which are true, relevant, as well as informative enough, and in a clear manner. But we also know people do not do that all the time or even in some circumstances seemingly violate it on purpose. If there are clear signs that the unwritten agreement is not followed, one will try to find out the reason. And it is usually the case that there is some additional conveyed meaning between the lines or a conversational implicature intended.

Conversational implicatures are primary examples of more being communicated than is said, but in order for them to be interpreted, some basic cooperative principle must be assumed to be in operation. Herbert Paul Grice, an Oxford philosopher, put forward the cooperative principle, or CP for short, and to specify it further, he introduced four categories of maxims as follows:

Quantity Maxim

1. Make your contribution (what you say) as informative (providing enough facts or ideas) as is required.
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required (providing too much information).

Quality Maxim

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.

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2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate (enough) evidence.

Relation Maxim

Be relevant (related to what has been said before).

Manner Maxim

1. Avoid obscurity of expression (hard to understand or not clear expression).

2. Avoid ambiguity.

3. Be brief.

4. Be orderly.

The fact that speakers or writers try to convey hidden meanings and hearers or readers are able to understand them suggests that the meanings are inferential. They can be worked out on the basis of the following:

(1) the conventional meaning of the words used, together with the identity of any references that may be involved;

(2) the verbal context, the situational context and the cultural context;

(3) the CP and its maxims;

(4) the interaction between the text and the reader

I. A Laconic Answer

There were some people in the southern part of Greece called Spartans, who were famous for simple habits and their bravery. The name of the area in which they lived was Laconia, and so they were also called Lacons.

One of the strange rules which the Lacons had was that they should speak briefly, and never use more words than were needed. And so a short answer is often spoken of as a laconic answer.

There was in the northern part of Greece a land called Macedon; and this land was at one time ruled over by a warlike king named Philip.

Philip wanted to become the master of all Greece. So he raised a great army, and made war upon the other states, until nearly all of them were forced to call him their king. Then he sent a letter to the Spartans in Laconia, saying, "If I go down into your country, I will level your great city to the ground."

In a few days, an answer was brought back to him. When he opened the letter, he found there was only one word. That word was "IF".

Notes:

1. rule; an official or accepted principle or order which guides behaviour, says how things are to be done
2. laconic; using few words
3. raise; to collect together
4. warlike; liking or skilled in war; ready for war or threatening war
5. level; to knock or pull down to the ground

Think it over:

What do you think of the "laconic answer"?

Contextual clues:

a. One of the strange rules which the Lacons had was that they should speak briefly, and never use more words than were needed.

b. Then he sent a letter to the Spartans in Laconia, saying, "If I go down into your country, I will level your great city to the ground."

c. When he opened the letter, he found there was only one word. That word was "IF".

Analysis and appreciation:

We know from the story that the brave Lacons would speak briefly and would never use more words than were needed, but we never thought that they would answer the war threatening letter with only one word "IF". One-word letter can never be said informative enough and the word "IF" is bound to appear ambiguous (violation of the Quantity and Manner maxims), and yet it was the very small word that had its conversational implicature unmistakably conveyed to the ambitious war-like Philip. He knew too well in the contexts what "IF" meant: if you dared, you would take the consequences!

What a laconic answer! One could never have any better idea than that discreetly chosen term. Any additional word would have been redundant or be less powerful in suggesting their firm stance at the critical moment and nothing in the letter would give rise to any ambiguity. And of course, even the aggressive king Philip had to weigh when he got the letter, to look before he leaped. This story perhaps accounts for the reason why people sometimes violate the CP and its maxims, for in some circumstances, it might be a better way or a strategy to have one's implied idea conveyed.

言简意赅的回答

在古希腊的南部,有一民族称作斯巴达人,该民族以其简朴的习俗和勇敢

的个性而闻名。他们居住的地方叫拉克尼亚,因此,他们也被称为拉克尼人。

拉克尼人有一条奇怪的规矩:说话必须简洁,不说多余话。因此,简短的回答常被称为拉克尼式回答。

希腊的北部是马其顿。该国曾经由好战的菲力普国王统治。

菲力普想要成为古希腊全境的主人。因此,他招募了一支庞大的军队,对其他的邦国(希腊当时有许多独立的小邦国,往往一个较大的城即为一个邦国)发动战争直至它们俯首称臣。接着,他派人送信给住在拉克尼亚的斯巴达人,信中说:“如果我进入你们的国家,我就会把你们的城池夷为平地。”

几天之后,对方给他回了一封信。打开信,他发现信里只有一个词。

那个词是“如果”。

II. Weird Coincidence

Two men were playing golf on a Saturday afternoon. They were getting frustrated, though, because the two women who were playing in front of them were quite slow, and were holding up the men's game.

“Don't they know they're supposed to let us play through?” asked the first man. The other shook his head. “I'm going to go ask them if we can play through... enough is enough.”

He started walking toward the women, but as he got close, he suddenly turned around and came back, his face white as a ghost.

“Oh God,” he said to his friend, “This is awful. You're going to have to ask those women if we can play through. You see, one of them is my wife, and the other is my mistress.”

The other man shrugged. He walked over toward the women, and just as he was getting close, turned around and came running back to his pal. His eyes wide open, he said, “Small world!”

Notes:

1. weird: very strange
2. coincidence: the happening by chance at the same time or place of two or more events which are similar or related

People often say, "I don't know", but they sometimes mean just the opposite. They just don't want to say it or they might think it impolite to say what they have in mind. Was it the position the husband was in? The similar family origin, the same brother-in-law status and each of the two wives having brothers all added up for the reason why his face turned pale. In the situation he could not have failed to make some association between the reality and the film. He was indeed scared, but since it was his first visit and together with his wife's older brothers, he might think it impolite to speak out what he felt directly. So his statement in the contexts could convey nothing but a negative meaning: he was not enjoying the film at all.

喜欢这部片子吗?

我是个有着意大利西西里血统的纽约人。我搬到亚利桑那州和一个出身在小镇的,血统纯正的美国男孩结婚的事,确实使我的家人吃惊不小。

第一次回家见我的亲戚时,我们都有点拘束。在我姐姐家吃过饭后,我去帮忙洗碗,我丈夫和我的几个哥哥看电视上重播的《教父》。我丈夫从未看过这部电影,因此,当我回到客厅和他一起看电视时,我问他是否喜欢这部片子。他仰起苍白的脸,脱口而出:“我不知道。他们刚把妹夫杀掉了。”

IV. What on Earth Is He Talking about?

The New Haven, Conn. Register reprinted this letter, written by assistant pressroom foreman Gil Johnson to his daughter:

I'm using this time while I have nothing to do to let you know that I have nothing to say.

People tend to look down at the word nothing and belittle its importance; however, it can make life or death, success or failure, joy or sadness.

Mountain climbers have died when they step on it. Parachutists are

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upset when they pull the ripcord and it comes out. Farmers have lost their farms when they drew it. Ball players and coaches have lost their jobs when score it. Women have been whistled at when they wore it as girdle or bra, and many women make a good living when they dance in it. It's also reason for joy when it represents the sum total of your debts.

It's what you earn when you do it. I have saved it over the years and now have it in my bank account.

It's what you generally learn from a politician making a speech. It's often discussed at meetings, and arguments and fights start over the subject. I often find it in my mailbox and only last night received it from the milk machine.

I could go on but it will mean nothing. I just want you to be aware as you go through life that when you get some time to relax you should think about this subject. Please do not think that I have been trying to give you sermon because I have nothing in mind.

Don't try to thank me. It's nothing.

Notes:

1. focus on: to direct (one's attention) to something
2. parachutist: a person who drops from an aircraft using a large usu. circular piece of cloth fastened by thin ropes to people or objects
3. ripcord: the cord that one pulls to open a parachute after jumping from an aircraft
4. girdle: a firm undergarment for women, worn round the waist and hips, that supports and shapes the stomach, hips, and bottom
5. bra: a woman's close-fitting undergarment worn to support the breasts
6. sermon: a long and solemn warning or piece of advice

A point to ponder:

Is nothing really nothing?

Part I

Read Between the Lines for Conversational Implicatures



Contextual clues:

a. I'm using this time while I have nothing to do to let you know that I have nothing to say.

b. People tend to look down at the word nothing and belittle its importance; however, it can make life or death, success or failure, joy or sadness.

c. I just want you to be aware as you go through life that when you get some time to relax you should think about this subject.

Analysis and appreciation:

Although Gil Johnson declared once and again that he had “nothing to say, nothing in mind and it's nothing” (irony, use of words which are clearly opposite to one's meaning, violation of the Quality maxim), he did write something or too much about “nothing” (more informative than is required, violation of the Quantity maxim) in his letter to his daughter. To the much-experienced father, “nothing” was by no means “nothing”, for it “can make life or death, success or failure, joy or sadness”. So he deliberately used another pronoun “it” to replace “nothing” almost throughout the letter. What he did in writing the letter was the intension that his daughter would read between the lines, to get the implicatures suggested in it.

To know what he was talking about, readers should focus on the implied meanings of the “it” in the contexts. For in each context, it or “nothing” might refer to a different thing. Some referred to something specific, e. g. “Ball players and coaches have lost their jobs when score it (nothing = no goal)”, some to something abstract, e. g. “it's (nothing = meaningless topic) often discussed at meetings”; some were employed to mock, to expose; others to describe his own hard life; still others to give advice to his daughter, e. g. “it's (nothing = no money) what you earn when you do it (nothing = no work)”. After reading the letter, we come to know what he wrote is really something—his precious

life experience, which he wanted to share with his daughter.

他究竟在谈什么？

《新乐园》杂志的康恩·罗杰斯特重新发表了由印刷车间的助理领班吉尔·约翰逊写给他女儿的信：

趁着没事可干，写信告诉你我没有什么可说的。

人们常会小看 nothing 这个词，并贬低其重要性。可它却能左右生死，决定成败，带来快乐或悲伤。

登山者会因脚下踩空而丧失生命；跳伞者会因拉伞索时伞打不开而惊惶失措；农民会因颗粒无收而失去农场；球员及教练会因没有进球而丢掉饭碗；女人会因为把它当作腰带或胸罩而被嘲笑，有些女人则因一丝不挂地跳舞而过上好的生活；而你会也因无债而感到一身轻。

如果你什么也不干，你就一分钱也挣不到。多年来我分文未攒，现在我的银行账户里就空空如也。

高谈阔论是你通常从一个政治家的演说中所能学到的东西。毫无意义的事是在会议中常被讨论的内容，争吵及对抗常因琐事而产生。在邮箱里，我常看不到任何信件，就在昨晚，牛奶机里又没牛奶了。

我可以继续写下去，但可能会白说。我只是想让你意识到，在你生命的过程中，有闲暇时，应该考虑这个问题。请不要以为我在对你说教，因为我心里并没这么想。

用不着谢我。这没什么。

V. The Cows Are Crying

A lady complained to her milkman of the quality of milk he sold her.

"Well, mum," said the milkman, "the cows don't get enough grass fed this time of year. They are just as sorry about it as I am. I often see them crying—regular crying, mum—because they feel as though their milk don't do them credit. Don't you believe it, mum?"

"Oh, yes, I believe it," responded his customer, "but I wish in future you'd see that they don't drop their tears into our can."

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Notes:

1. quality: the degree to which something is excellent; standard of goodness
2. feed: to give food to; (esp. of an animal) to eat
3. regular: happening or appearing with the same amount of time or space between each one and the next; not varying
4. credit: a cause of honor; public approval or praise given to someone because of something they have done
5. can: a usu. round metal container with an open top or removable lid and sometimes with handles, used for holding milk, oil waste, etc.

Think it over:

Did the old lady believe the milkman's "crying cow" story?

Contextual clues:

- a. A lady complained to her milkman of the quality of milk he sold her.
- b. "...They are just as sorry about it as I am. I often see them crying—regular crying, mum—because they feel as though their milk don't do them credit..."
- c. "...but I wish in future you'd see that they don't drop their tears into our can."

Analysis and appreciation:

Confronting the accusation of the poor quality of milk, the milkman did not argue with the lady. After admitting "the cows don't get enough grass fed this time of year", he made up a "guilty cows" story (personification, a figure of speech, violation of the maxim of Quality), which had his conversational implicature that he was sorry humorously conveyed to the considerate old Lady. Impressed by the milkman's sense of humour the lady was happy to follow suit by reminding the milkman to