

亚历山大英语学习丛书

外研社 朗文

请教亚历山大

(英语学习 200 问)

ASK ALEXANDER

L. G. 亚历山大

编



外语教学与研究出版社



LONGMAN 朗文



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L.G. 亚历山大 编著

赵兵 刘晖 译

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出版说明

英国著名的英语教学专家路易·亚历山大(L. G. Alexander)先生是风靡中国近 30 年的《跟我学》(*Follow Me*) 和《新概念英语》(*New Concept English*)的作者。他的《朗文英语语法》(*Longman English Grammar*)也是语法书中的佼佼者,至今畅销世界。亚历山大先生潜心研究英语教学法,结合实际教学经验(他曾在欧洲多所大学任教),经过多年的埋头写作,又为英语作为外语的学习者和教师编写了一系列极为有用的参考书。《英语辩论手册》(*For and Against*)引导您使用英语表达自己的论点,针锋相对地驳斥对手的看法,很能帮助英语学习者提高口头表达能力。《朗文英语词汇用法手册》(*Right Word Wrong Word*)可以指导您辨析和正确使用近义词、同义词和其他难词。《请教亚历山大》(*Ask Alexander*)则可以解答您在学习和教学中遇到的疑惑,并且启发您学习和教学的思路。如果您迫切希望提高对英语语法的认识,而又是一位初学者,亚历山大先生专为您提供了一套《朗文循序渐进学英语语法》(*Step by Step*),可使您一步一个脚印地掌握英语语法。如果您认为自身已具有中级水平,但还需要提高,那么您可以选择《朗文高级英语语法(参考及练习)》(*Longman Advanced Grammar: Reference and Practice*),它会使您如虎添翼。如果您刚学完《朗文英语语法》,意犹未尽,您可以自我测试一番,做做《朗文英语语法练习》(*Longman English Grammar Practice*),该书其实是《朗文英语语法》不可或缺的一部分。

外研社一直以全心全意服务于中国外语学习者为宗旨,致力于为中国外语学习者提供最全面的外语教学用词典、教材、读物和参考书。为了使中国英语学习者更多地得益于亚历山大先生的功能主义教学思想,在阅读、听说、写作和语法方面有长足的进步,外研社与朗文公司精诚合作,再次携手推出以上一系列的英语教学丛书,希望读者对我们的工作提出宝贵的建议和意见。

内容提要

怎样才能学好英语？英语有什么特点？怎样看待英语学习中的语法现象？需要用什么样的工具书？怎样才能提高自己的英语阅读理解能力？如何辨别众多的英语同义词的细微差别？

本书作者致力于英语教学的推广工作，对如何提高英语学习的成效极具经验，他在本书中跟大家谈谈以上这些问题。本书有以下特点：

1. 新的概念。本书采取一问一答的形式。作者以他特有的观点，从不同的方面来讨论广大英语学习者在学习英语中所遇到的问题。
2. 可读性强。本书语言流畅，例子生动，读者可在轻松愉快中获得教益。
3. 通俗流畅，适应面广。读者不论年龄，开卷有益。初学者可从本书中看到努力的方向；英语工作者可从中寻到提高的路径；专家、学者阅读本书，相当于进行学术交流。

译者的话

英语，在我国是用处最广泛的一种外语，也是学习的人数最多的一种外语。一些学习英语的年轻人，常常提出这样一些问题：怎样才能速成？如何扩大词汇量？如何提高阅读技巧？同义词的用法如何掌握？怎样提高口、笔译水平？……

亚历山大先生在本书中采用一问一答的方式来与我们一起探讨了这些问题。题目轻松活泼，很是风趣。文字明白流畅，娓娓而谈。众多的例子，信手拈来，恰当自然。

作为世界著名的英语教学权威，曾为交际教学法奠定基础的亚历山大先生坚信：衡量学生是否掌握一门语言，最终是要看他运用如何，而不是懂得多少。本书的写法虽是轻松活泼，但这些意见和看法却是作者从多年的英语教学和研究中总结出来的经验之谈，更是他多年的心血结晶。很多精辟的意见都来自他自己的实际经验，所以是很实际的，也是很实用的。

语言文字，有很多问题很难用一套一成不变的理论来规范它。中文如此，英语亦不例外。但我们仍然坚信，正确的实践需要正确的理论作为指导。读者可以通过阅读本书，掌握英语学习的某些基本要领，这对学好英语会大有裨益。

有一点需要说明一下：为真实性起见，书中大多提问都是未经修改的中国师生所写的英语，存在大量不够规范之处，请读者对此持批判的眼光。

本书在翻译过程中，由于时间紧迫，难免有所疏漏。我们恳切希望读者予以批评指正。

译者

1999年6月

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I. Questions about English-Teaching

1. I'm frustrated with reading classes. Always a rather long reading; then some comprehension questions. Is there any way to transfer what we have learned from reading into communication?

I sympathize with your frustration! The kind of reading you are describing is a total waste of time; you expend an enormous amount of effort and energy presenting a reading text through explaining grammar points and vocabulary, only to end up with a few comprehension questions which do not do justice to the text. Then you have to begin the same boring routine all over again with a new reading text. There are two observations to make here:

- 1) We have to distinguish between intensive and extensive reading.

Intensive reading involves the detailed study of a very short text, followed by a variety of exercises based on the text. This is the exact reverse of what you have been experiencing. In this approach, you spend a short time presenting the text (not more than 10~15 minutes) and the rest of the lesson exploiting what you have presented. The text can therefore be used as the basis for a conversation lesson or for the development of language study and writing skills.

- 2) Reading long texts (stories, newspaper articles, etc.) for pleasure or information is **extensive reading**. Students should be set extensive reading exercises as homework (for example, through a class library system in which they exchange simplified Readers). You may briefly test them orally on what they have

read, or, far more efficiently, get them to complete questionnaires you have prepared in advance and which will tell you at a glance whether your students have completed a reading assignment.

The reason for your frustration is that you have been attempting to conduct extensive reading in class, which is about the most boring and unproductive thing you can do. Choose textbooks with very short texts for use in the classroom and set longer reading tasks as home assignments.

Finally, can students transfer what they have learned from reading into communication? Yes, but indirectly. Reading is not only a source of pleasure and information (therefore giving you topics to talk about), it also consolidates what you know and constantly enriches your vocabulary. Students who read a lot in English provide themselves with excellent foundations. They gain confidence, and ultimately become better at communicating orally and in writing than students who read very little.

2. Keeping the students in English is a problem. Whenever I try to do an activity, the students do it in Chinese. I tell them to use English, but they won't. Anyway, how can I keep them in English?

The students' mother tongue should be used for three purposes only: 1) maintaining class discipline; 2) explaining a tricky point of grammar and comparing and contrasting it with a structure in Chinese; 3) when you are explaining the meaning in English of a difficult vocabulary item, it is always advisable to ask one of your best students to give you a 'confirmatory translation'.

Everything else you do should be entirely in English. Don't

conduct translation exercises with beginners as this encourages them to think bilingually and invites interference from the mother tongue. Remember, the best translators are people who are fluent in a foreign language, not those who have used grammar-translation methods during their learning careers.

So why do your students insist on using Chinese even though you tell them not to? One possible reason is that you are setting them tasks which are too difficult for them, so they resort to Chinese. For example, you can't conduct a conversation lesson in English if your students are barely capable of answering or asking questions, or of formulating simple statements. In the same way, you can't expect your students to write essays in English if they can't even write a single sentence correctly. Students need to be trained in productive skills until they are ready to conduct them. This means that you give them plenty of structured exercises in English before giving them open-ended activities. For example, you train them to speak by providing them with question and answer practice, re-telling stories in their own words by referring to pictures or notes. In structured activities of this kind, your students just won't be able to avoid using English. A planned lesson begins in a highly structured way and becomes freer at the end, so students get used to using English all the time.

3. I have a large class. We are often told that every student should be motivated under such circumstances. What is the most effective way to get greater student participation?

The main reason why there is lack of participation in large classes is that lessons are dominated by one or two students (not necessarily the best ones), while the rest of the class is neglected

and consequently becomes bored and even rebellious. So how can we overcome this? Let's first ask ourselves what is required to achieve participation. Where listening comprehension is concerned we want *everybody* to participate; where speaking is concerned, we want as many students as possible to be given the opportunity to speak.

Let's look at listening comprehension first. Never ask a class simply to listen to a text while you read it to them or play a recording. If you do this you can be sure most of your students will switch off while you drone your way through the reading text. You can prevent this from happening by setting your students a listening objective. Instead of saying 'Listen to this please', you say something like 'I'm now going to read you a story about an accident. After I've finished reading, I'm going to ask you how the accident happened. Ready?' Now your students will listen *actively* to find out the answer to the question because they will be afraid of losing face.

Now we want as many students as possible to participate in speaking. How do we go about it? When you have finished reading, don't let one or two students shout out the right answer. Ask questions like: How many of you think the accident happened because ...? (The students answer with a show of hands.) Ask questions round the class using the 'question, pause, pounce' technique:

Teacher (addressing a **question** to the whole class): What action did the bus driver take?

The question is followed by a **pause** so the whole class has time to think about the answer. (You must discipline your students never to shout out answers without being asked!)

Now you **pounce**, asking one student, then another to answer

the question, asking Student A whether he/she agrees with Student B, and so on round the class. Your questions should be rapid, using a scatter-gun technique, but always following the question-pause-pounce sequence. I can assure you, if you follow this advice, your entire class will participate in the lesson!

4. There is so much emphasis on grammar, however, there doesn't seem to be much room for communication. It feels like a test. Is learning grammar really a help for communication?

You put your finger on it when you say 'it feels like a test'. What you're referring to is the old grammar-translation method. In this approach, language learning was concerned entirely with rule-giving followed by exercises (fill in the blanks, translation, etc.). This was how we learnt ancient languages like Greek and Latin, and it was considered to be the proper way to teach modern languages as well. The trouble is, we never had to speak Greek and Latin, whereas in modern language teaching we're concerned with the four primary skills of understanding, speaking, reading and writing. Clearly, grammar exercises alone are not going to meet the needs of communication. If that is all we do in class, then you are right: it is just a constant grammar test. In the past, grammar was the master and communication (if it occurred at all) was the by-product.

Today, the situation has been entirely reversed. Communication is the master and grammar is the support system. This doesn't mean that in communicative teaching grammar is unnecessary; merely that its role has been re-defined. What we do today is teach students communicative activities (conducting transactions, engaging in interaction, and so on) and then use grammar as the support system of these activities. After all,

grammar is the operating system of a language: it tells us how and why things happen, so we still need it for this purpose. This means, we teach grammar *after* conducting communicative activities, not before or instead of conducting them.

The main reason we teach grammar is that we can't avoid it. Students will always want to know how or why things happen in language. Questions about how things happen refer to form (for example, how we ask questions in English); questions about why things happen refer to use (for example, why we can't say "I haven't seen him since six years"). Language teaching must be communication-based, but it must also be supported by constant explanation, clarification and the opportunity to practise difficult forms; i. e. grammar. You can't become a skilled performer of a musical instrument without practising scales, and scales are like grammar in language acquisition.

5. How can I teach more efficiently in a communicative way by using the class textbook?

I find this question particularly difficult to answer because I don't know which textbook you are referring to. For example, is it a textbook which contains a lot of communication-based exercises, or is it one that contains hardly any? Anyway, a few comments might help to clarify the question.

The first thing to remember is that it is impossible to begin to communicate if we don't understand what we hear. Therefore listening comprehension and reading comprehension are the important receptive skills we need to develop before we can apply the productive skills of speaking and writing. You need to provide your students with as much listening comprehension practice as time

allows before they can develop their speaking skills. In order to speak a language we have to be able to do four things:

- understand
- ask
- answer
- say

Therefore listening comprehension exercises should be followed by plenty of practice in asking and answering questions. Students have to manipulate the whole regular and irregular verb system to be able to ask and answer fluently, so rapid question and answer practice should follow every listening comprehension text. Practice in 'saying' can be achieved by getting students to reproduce the substance of the listening comprehension practice in their own words. There always has to be a transfer between text-based exercises and life-based exercises. After students have practised 'saying' the text, you should switch to 'About You' exercises where students tell you about their own experiences.

We need to concentrate on three main areas when developing communicative conversational skills. These are:

- transactions; that is, 'doing business' in a foreign language: e.g. ordering a meal in a restaurant, changing money in a bank, etc. Transactions always follow predictable patterns and the participants fulfil particular roles; e.g. ticket-seller and customer; nurse and patient, etc.
- interaction involving the exchange of information: you tell me about your troubles and I'll tell you about my troubles and so on.
- interaction involving opinions and argument: you tell me what you think about something and I'll agree or disagree with you and tell you what I think.

These are just a few ideas to help you enrich your textbook or get more out of it.

6. How can I decide on when and how I correct students' mistakes?

Spoken language

If you are listening to a student speaking and your main objective is to develop fluent speech, don't interrupt. Wait till the student finishes speaking or reaches a convenient pause. Then correct only those mistakes that interfere with the student's ability to communicate. So just pick up one or two big mistakes and correct them lightly, asking the student to repeat the correct version after you. Your main aim in this situation is to build up your students' confidence and to develop *fluency*.

Drills are concerned with form, so if you are conducting a drill (e.g. to train students to add -s to the third person singular of the simple present), correct a student immediately if he/she says *He go* instead of *He goes*. Your main aim here is to develop accuracy, so you don't allow any mistake to go uncorrected. A student repeats the correct version after you until he/she really gets it right.

Written language

Use codes when correcting written work: e.g. sp for spelling; gr for grammar; voc for vocabulary. Periodically, pool the main mistakes in your students' written work and deal with them collectively on the blackboard, inviting the students themselves a) to identify errors and b) to suggest corrections.

7. As a Chinese teacher, how can I raise my students' interest so that they learn English on their own initiative?

Students are always more motivated when they regard English as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. Compare the attitudes of young pupils who are told repeatedly that English will be extremely important to them in their lives, and the attitudes of students who find they need English for a particular purpose (say to study medicine or law). The former are quickly bored; the latter are highly-motivated. The way to raise motivation among young pupils is to set them project work, where English is a means to an end. For example, if you set pupils the task of finding out about the history of Hong Kong, this will be their prime objective and English will be a by-product of the process.

8. How should I teach students grammar in my teaching?

Modern textbooks concentrate on teaching communication (= how to do things in a foreign language). Grammar is the natural by-product of this undertaking. This means, you teach grammar not as an end in itself, but as a support system to communication. Most of the questions students have about English concern grammar (when to use *some* or *any*, when to use *to* or *at* and so on). Deal with these as they arise. When dealing with grammar, extract as much information as you can from your students and then set them exercises to raise their awareness of particular grammatical points, but always do this *after* you have trained them in communicative skills like listening comprehension, using language for a purpose, etc.

9. Speaking good English is not the same as being a good English teacher. Can you give me some suggestions to be a good English teacher?

I agree absolutely that speaking good English is not the same as being a good teacher of English. It goes without saying that good native speakers of English are not necessarily also good teachers; in fact their command of English may make them insensitive to problems of learners. However, in your case, as a non-native speaker it is important for you to be as fluent as possible so that you feel confident in class, so you should avoid using Chinese and make sure you constantly use your English. Additionally, however, you have to master skills which are connected with language teaching. The best way to do this is to use textbooks with a dependable graded syllabus and with sound methods, which you then follow. You will then be trained in:

- conducting exercises that develop listening comprehension
- conducting exercises that develop conversational skills (oral fluency)
- conducting exercises that develop reading comprehension
- conducting exercises that develop writing skills

Each of these is a major topic, too big to go into here. Look at the textbooks you are using and ask yourself how well they are training you in these skills. To sum up: Use your English as much as possible to maintain fluency, then master the skills that specifically relate to language-teaching and language-learning methodology.