

语言篇

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Liu Ailing (standing) teaches a class of primary school students 'Child-centred Science and Technology Centre to

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MARCH 30, 2000

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编者前言

《21 世纪报》是颇受广大读者,尤其是青少年读者欢迎的一份国内出版的英文报纸。这份报纸之所以能拥有较大的读者群,无疑是因为它具有较高的可读性。所谓可读性体现在内容和文字两个方面。就内容而言,除了重大的国内外时事新闻外,这份报纸刊登的许多文章的内容都是广大青少年读者感兴趣的,和他们的生活十分贴近的;就文字而言,这份报纸的英语比较浅近,具有高中以上英语水平的人大体都能阅读。

尽快、尽好地掌握英语,是广大青少年的迫切愿望。大量阅读是学习外语的一种重要方法。但总的来说,目前适合青少年阅读的英语出版物还不够多。于是我们便萌发了从《21 世纪报》中挑选一些精粹文章汇编成册,以飨读者的想法。我们翻阅了 1995 年以来的《21 世纪报》,根据内容分别汇编成《文化篇》、《语言篇》、《科技篇》和《思考篇》四种,为减少阅读过程中的阻力,我们对文集中的部分生词、难点和难句作了一些注释。这样的读物具有很强的知识性和趣味性。读者不仅能获得大量有关世界各国的社会文化知识、有关英语语言的知识、最新的科技发展信息、学会不少做人的道理,同时也必将提高自己的英语水平。可以说是“轻轻松松学英语”的一种好方式。

我们相信我们所做的这项工作是有意义的,广大读者一定能从这套读物中获益。对《21 世纪报》编辑部给予的支持,我们在此表示感谢。

2000 年 5 月

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English embraced as the new global language

For the first time in the history of civilization, we appear to be on the verge of^① having a genuine world language.

The spread of English throughout the planet has become an unprecedented linguistic phenomenon, “unique in the history of the world,” says Braj B. Kachru, recognized internationally as one of the foremost authorities on the use of English.

No matter whose statistics one believes, it is clear that English now has more non-native speakers than native ones. Some estimates put the ratio at four-to-one in favour of the non-native speaker.

It is a trend that often sparks debate — a debate loaded with emotions, political views and economic interests so intense that they have clouded recognition of what’s truly going on out there in the linguistic world.

What’s happening is that English indeed is becoming

① on the verge of 接近于

the international language — except that now it's "Englishes," says Kachru, editor of a series of books titled *English in the Global Context*.

In a number of countries English has become virtually a local language. It often becomes a tool for different language factions within a nation to communicate effectively among themselves.

To Kachru, the use of English in Asian, African and Caribbean literature offers proof that the language is taking root and becoming a vehicle for the expression of local culture rather than just a convenient tongue for international communication.

Kachru's native India is one of the countries whose English has been studied most.

Malaysia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Kenya and the Philippines are among a host of other nations often mentioned as having their own forms of English operating within the country.

Whatever form English takes in each country, it all adds up to lots of English — according to some estimates more than \$ 10 billion a year in worldwide business, including classes, textbooks and other learning aids are generated by the use of the English language.

Kachru's view of "world Englishes" has been widely supported, but also much opposed, in part by so-called purists who feel the language will decay with too much local adaptation.

The English language, unlike French, Spanish and Italian, for example, has never had an official academy to determine what's acceptable in the language and what isn't. Attempts to form one have never been successful.

Native speakers

Kachru doesn't think it right that native speakers somehow control their language. "Who owns English? If you can use it, you own it," he says, intentionally employing the word "use" rather than "speak."

Another fallacy^① or myth is believing that people learn English in order to talk to native speakers, or to somehow be part of a Western culture. Many English users, it appears, don't even think of English as a Western language anymore.

Ian Seaton, head of the British Council's "English 2000" initiative, gives the example of Eastern Europeans who flock to English classes but aren't concerned about what kind of accent they learn. "A foreign accent is not the disadvantage it once was. Even in broadcasting, reporters with foreign accents can be an asset."

A very big part of the world's English-speaking activity takes place completely within the realm of non-native speakers.

Some language authorities argue that the whole concept of the native speaker is no longer meaningful. Kachru tends to think in terms of multilingual societies where most citizens speak several languages, English being a key one.

The colonial history of English, of course, is to a great extent responsible for the language getting planted around the world, but authorities say its growth in more recent times stems from its use in technology and science, advertising, pop music, international business in general, and various cooperative efforts among countries such as air-traffic control and the work of the United Nations and its agencies.

① fallacy 谬误

Kachru, although saying he is a student rather than a promoter of the unique phenomenon of English as a world language, clearly sees benefits of English taking root in different countries. It becomes a medium, he says, for expressing local culture in a way that others can understand.

Larry E. Smith of Honolulu's East-West Centre agrees. "The use of English offers a medium to express and explain cultural differences."

Whether English is essentially the best language for this purpose is much debated, but some would say it still remains undecided.

Joshua A. Fishman of Yeshiva University in New York has addressed this point, noting that many people consider French, for example, as more beautiful, musical, pleasant, refined and graceful.

"But the real powerhouse is still English,"^① Fishman concludes. "It doesn't have to worry about being loved because, loved or not, it works. It makes the world go round."

(21 st)

① "But the real powerhouse is still English,..." "但是真正的动力源仍然是英语……"

A tale about how English became a global language

The rise of English is a remarkable tale as Professor David Crystal reminds us in his attractive, short book “English as a global language.”

It is certainly quite a theme. When Julius Caesar^① landed in Britain more than 2,000 years ago, English did not exist.

Five hundred years later, English, virtually incomprehensible to modern ears, was probably spoken by about as few people as currently speak Cherokee, the language of a small North American Indian tribe — and with as little influence.

About 1,000 years later, at the end of the 16th century, and after the Norman Conquest, the Reformation^② and the arrival of commercial printing technology, English was

-
- ① Julius Caesar 恺撒(一译凯撒,100—44BC,罗马统帅,政治家,与庞培克拉苏结成“前三头同盟”,后击败庞培,成为罗马独裁者[49—44],被共和派贵族刺杀,订定儒略历,著有《高卢战记》等)。
- ② the Reformation 宗教改革(16世纪欧洲改革天主教会的运动,结果产生新教)

the native speech of between 5 million and 7 million people.

And yet now look at it. As the second millennium approaches, English is more widely scattered, more widely spoken and written than any other language has ever been; in the title of this book it has become a truly “global language.”

According to Crystal, whose efforts as a statistician almost rival his diligence as a linguist (he is also the editor of the very useful “Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English language”) about 2.09 billion people (well over a third of the world’s population) are, as he puts it “routinely exposed to^① English.”

As he rightly points out, what is impressive about this staggering figure is “not so much the grand total but the speed with which expansion has taken place since the ’50s.

In 1950, the case for English as a world language would have been no more than plausible. Fifty years on and the case is virtually won.”^②

So what happened?

Someone once said that a language is a dialect with an army and a navy. In other words, when the British navy set out to conquer the world, it set out an “army” of English-speaker. As the British empire spread throughout the world, English became the basis of law, commerce and education. The British empire was succeeded by another (the American), which shared virtually the same linguistic heritage. In the history of the West, this had never happened before.

Of course, it’s not quite that simple.

① exposed to 在……的影响(作用)下

② In 1950, ...and the case is virtually won. 1950年,“英语是世界语”的观点可能还站不住脚。而50年以后,这个论断基本成了事实。plausible (观点等)貌似真实的。

For lay readers, the most valuable part of Crystal's study is the section devoted to a speedy analysis of the cultural basis of this global reach, notably the influence of broadcasting, press, advertising, popular music and film.

Crystal is actually not slow to recognize the significance of Americans in the story he sketches here.

One of his most interesting passages concerns the role played by the League of Nations,^① and later the United Nations, in spreading English as an international language in the aftermath of the two world wars.

He is also up-to-date and informative in his identification of the (largely American) World Wide Web^② as a powerful reinforcer of American cultural and linguistic dominance.

But when he comes to address the vital question "Why is English a world language?" he does not do much better than to state, "It is a language which has repeatedly found itself in the right place at the right time."

What Crystal also fails to do is to examine with much precision or insight the way in which American English, having become the rocket-fuel of the English language, has magically transported into areas undreamed of 40, let alone 400, years ago.

The section on what he calls "the US situation" is taken up not with an overview of the extraordinary vitality of

① League of Nations 国际联盟(第一次世界大战末根据凡尔赛和约于1920年建立的国际组织,旨在促进维护世界和平,总部设在日内瓦,于1946年解散,其某些职能由联合国取代)

② World Wide Web 万维网(由计算机服务器构成的相互联接的系统,是因特网的一个最年轻的分部。因其赏心悦目的网页和只需点击的超文本衔接系统,现已成为因特网上最大也是访问人数最多的通道)