

小歌◎著
申葆青/序

小歌 话英文

在原汁原味的英语世界里，体会丰富多彩的语言魅力

语言是用来表达情感的，它不受语法的束缚——先有语后有法，语言的精髓在于感觉，而非法规。英语是要慢慢学、细细品的，如同一杯香茗、一杯咖啡……其实她就是「杯英文」。



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Foreword
序

申葆青

这是我儿子写的书。我为这本书作序,不仅因为这是我儿子的书,而且因为这是一本很不错的书。从某种意义上看,这本书是我在20多年前所做的广播节目“星期日英语”的延续。

小歌在1980年1月由中国教育部选派去美国学习英语,当时他还是北京大学二年级的学生。到美国不久,他就发回他在美国的作品,题目有关美国的生活、文化、历史、人物,等等。那时寄稿件都是用普通航空信件,E-mail还没有发明呢。我在“星期日英语”广播节目中选用了不少他的文章,有几篇还是他自己播讲的。当时他还真有些“粉丝”呢。

1982年暑假,小歌回国探亲。我把他的“星期日英语”的稿



费给了他。小歌把这些钱放在他书桌的抽屉里,出门办事或会朋友就取出些带在身上。每当我看见他的“银行”里的“存款”不多时,我就悄悄放些进去,他全然不知。3个月的暑期结束了,小歌惊讶地发现他的稿费居然能这么经花;他兴奋地告诉我:“妈,写作还真赚钱啊!”也许这就是使他坚持写作的“动力”吧。

这本书收集了小歌几年来为《海外英语》和《英语沙龙》杂志撰写的专栏文章。文章内容从英语趣谈到解读美国的风俗文化,再到纵谈北京的现实生活,主题丰富,诙谐有趣。我希望读者们能像我一样喜欢这本书——我儿子的书。

2009 年春

III 作者自述

About the Author

About the Author

作者自述

小 歌

自幼好读书。及入小学,家中藏书尽失于文革浩劫,仅存英文原著一箱,遂苦读英文。虽急功近利,但多得名师指点,颇有心得。高中毕业下乡务农,辍耕之余,翻译康拉德 (Joseph Conrad) 中篇小说《青春》,与插队的朋友于陋室中咏读,自得其乐。1977年高考恢复,考入北京大学西语系英语专业;1980年由教育部放洋留美,主修英美文学,与当地同学共读莎翁、海明威等名家的著作,苦不堪言,三年后完成英语学士学位;1990年获社会学博士学位。多年从事犯罪学研究,在司法及公共卫生界发表众多专业论文,以青少年犯罪研究获联邦卫生与人文服务总署全美大奖。多年来,除了在自己的本专业内发表许多学术文章外,在电台、报纸和杂志上经常发表英语作品。长期为国内英语期刊撰稿并开有专栏。



Words from Editor

编者的话

小 蚊

刚开始从事《海外英语》杂志的组稿工作,编者有幸通过一位旅居国外的友人介绍结识了小歌老师。根据这本杂志的读者定位,我们和小歌老师商定了 A Cup of English 这一栏目,为读者提供各种各样英语语言 and 文化的知识。

小歌老师为这个栏目撰写了题材各异的文章——“悠闲英语”(Xiaoge's English)从遣词用字到标点正误,从单词的正确使用到句子的写作技巧,小歌老师为读者留下了他研究英语的经验,让我们领略英语文字的魅力,像做游戏一样把英语单词和语法的学习串联起来,寓教于乐,英语学习从此变得乐趣无穷;“字解美国”(Life and Culture in America)从美国的节假日到如何在美国看病就医,给我们呈现了美国社会和文化的方方面面,囊括体育、节日、政党、历史、医疗、日常生活等主题,色彩缤纷,点评语言锐利而风趣。

小歌老师身在中国期间,除了作《海外英语》的专栏作家和在一些知名高校进行专业的演讲,还为《英语沙龙》杂志撰写专栏,以散文杂记的形式记叙了自己在北京的生活感受,以及对北京的人和事的感想,在“北京笔记”(Beijing Notes)中我们可以找到这些细致描写,感情真挚,有着浓浓的思乡情怀。

小歌老师本人平易近人,他的写作风格融合中西方文化,以轻松风趣的笔触书写丰富多彩的内容,让我们在学习英语的同时享受人文文化。在《小歌话英文》这本书里,你可以在英语的世界里畅游,学习地道的英语语言表达,了解丰富多彩的美国文

V 编者的话

Words from Editor

化,充分体会英语语言的魅力。

Learning English is so relaxing and easy! Just enjoy it with Xiaogell

本书作者和编者感谢《英语沙龙》杂志社郭磊社长为本书中“北京笔记”章节的文章出让版权。谢谢《英语沙龙》杂志的支持。

2010年1月

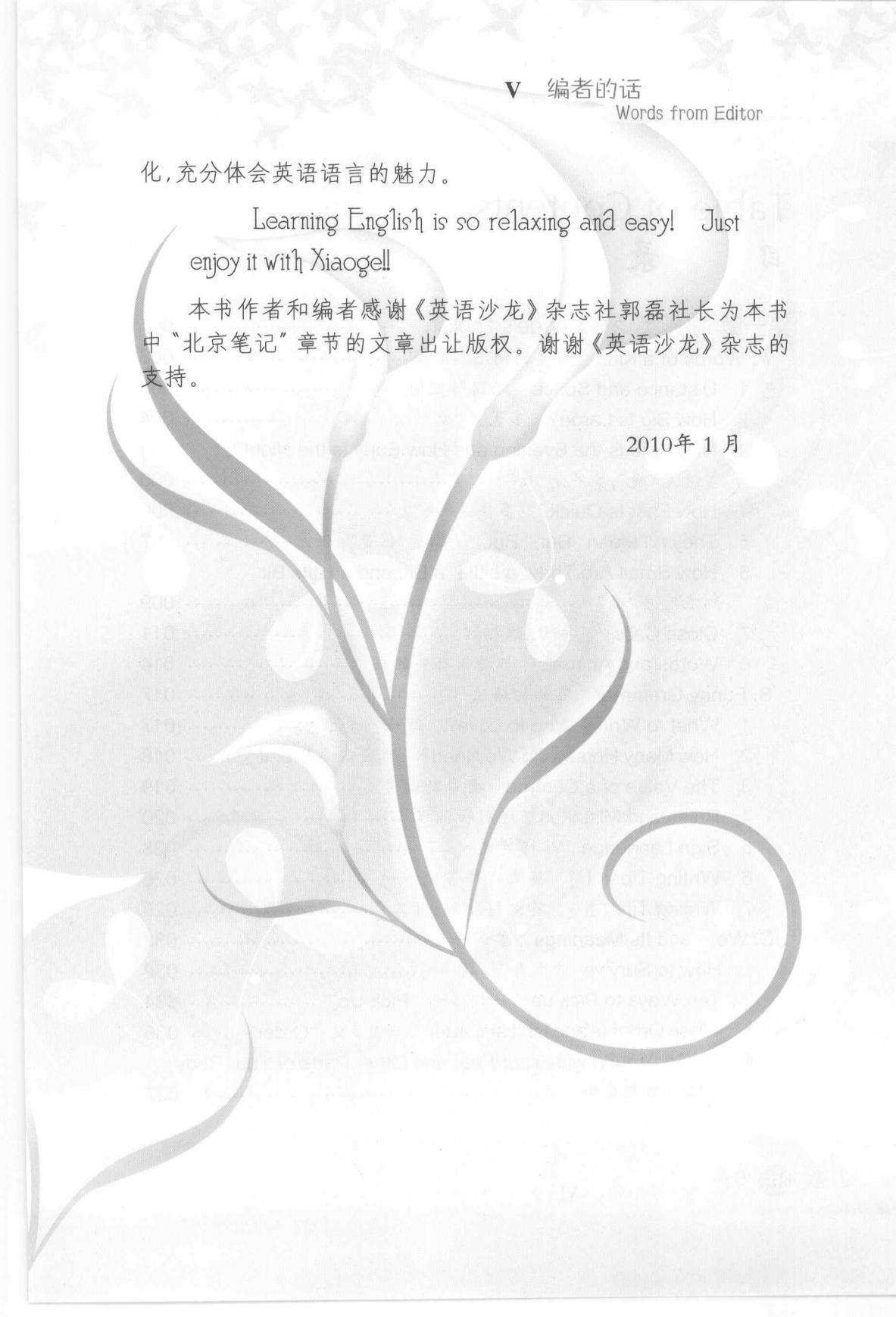


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第一章

悠闲英语

*Xiaoge's
English*



和一位大学同学交谈时提到我们的一位教授，老先生曾给我们全班一句名言：“别人听不懂你讲不明白的话”。我们时常埋怨别人不能理解我们的思路和所表达的意义，可原因往往是我们自己不明所思和混淆的表达。境遇此况，我们需要检查自己的用词是否准确，所用之词对听者来说是否简单易懂。并且，不仅要用词简练、意义明了，还需要适合环境、恰到好处，这样才能与听者有效地交流。

在本章中我和读者讨论英语简单明了的用词方法，以作者的亲身经历为主线，从感性入手，不死抠语法。语言是用来表达情感的，它不受语法的束缚。先有语后有法，语言的精髓在于感觉，而不在法规。英语是要慢慢学细细品的，如同一杯香茶或一杯咖啡……其实她就是“一杯英文”。

A college classmate recently reminded me of a remark made by one of our common professors that “people cannot understand you if you don't make yourself clear.” We sometimes blame others for not understanding what we say. More often than not, however, people couldn't understand us because we did not make ourselves clear. Did we use the right word? Did we use a simple word that could easily get what we meant across to the other person? Not only did we use a simple word, but did we use a simple word appropriate for the situation?

This section is meant to discuss with word-savvy friends meanings and usages of simple English words. All the materials included in this section are based on my understanding of and experiences with the English language. They may not have pinpoint precision in grammar, but they worked effectively in most situations. In any event, this section is meant for English readers who want to relax, smile, and even have a laugh over a cup of coffee, or, perhaps, over a “Cup of English.”

A. Words of a kind 同类的词汇

1

Distance and Space

距离与空间

Driving on highways in Beijing, one often sees signs like “KEEP SPACE.” What does it mean? Perhaps, the sign “Keep Space” does not mean anything to an English speaking driver. Space means an area, and it does not have a sense of directions. *This space is big enough for a dining table; it is a very spacious room.* So, it would be difficult to keep your space between other vehicles on highway.

On the other hand, “distance” means the length between point A and point B. You can keep a certain distance from something in front of you, behind you, on your left, or on your right. You can say to your driver friend: “Please keep a safe distance from the car in front of you.” You can also say to a fellow passenger: “Move over and give me some more space.” In this sense, the more meaningful sign should be “Keep Distance.” Indeed, it is a lot easier to “keep distance” than “keep space” when driving.



How big is large and how large is big? Someone asked me a question the other day: When should we use “large” and when should we use “big”?

These two words are used interchangeably most of the time: A big tree, a large tree; a big dog, a large dog.

But large sometimes implies size in area and mass; big, on the other hand, indicates height and maturity.

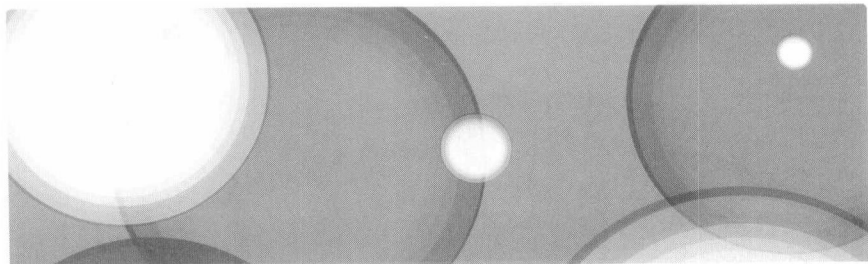
You are a big girl now, and you should help with house chores (meaning you are old enough). “*You are a large girl*” means being large in size, which is not very polite to say to a girl.

You are a big woman, and you can handle the situation (meaning the woman is able to do something). Again, we cannot say “*you are a large woman, and you can handle the situation.*” “Large” only means that the woman is large in size. If, somehow, you have to make such an expression to a woman, make sure you have a good life insurance.

There are many big tall ships (tall ships=ships with many sails)* *in the harbor.* Here, we describe the height of the sails of the ships and usually do not say large tall ships. But, we do hear people say “*a large aircraft carrier*”; the reason, I think, is apparent.

Now, is Beijing a big city or a large city?

*: Tall ships as in the poem: “I must go down to the sea again, to the lonely sea and the sky, and all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by...”



3

How Late Is the Evening and How Early Is the Night? 多晚是“晚”,多早是“夜”?

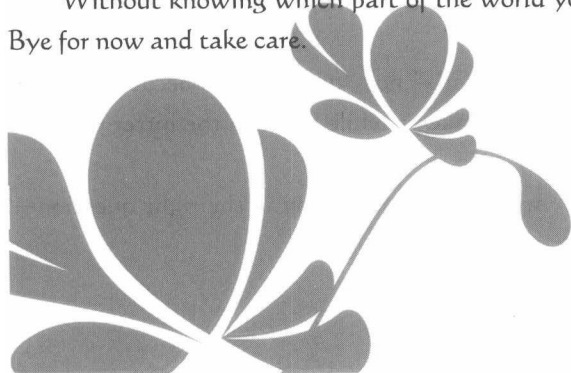
“Good evening” and “good night” are, perhaps, two most commonly used expressions. But, when do people use “good night” and when do they use “good evening”? Most of us learned when and how to greet with “good evening” and to bid “good night” in class rooms. But, in everyday life, people use “good evening” and “good night” at different times of the day and for various occasions.

At the end of a workday, 5 pm, or sometimes as early as 3 pm, people say to one another, “good night.” In a restaurant, a waiter or waitress would greet dinner guests with “good evening” through the night.

I came home from a trip last night at close to 9 pm. As our plane landed, the air stewardess thanked the passengers for flying with the crew and the airline and wished us a good evening.

Maybe “good night” is not appropriate in this situation even though it was pretty late in the day. “Good night” has the implication of completing a day; people are done with their business for the day and want to retire for the night. For the passengers, it might take them some more time before they could get home, and the crew members might have another trip to make before they could call it a night. For both passengers and the crew, it was still an evening.

Without knowing which part of the world you are in, I will just say: Bye for now and take care.



The words “fast” and “quick” are often used interchangeably in everyday English. But, there are apparent differences between the two. In certain circumstances, we use “fast” but not “quick” and in others “quick” instead of “fast.”

My hunch for the differences in the two words is that “quick” indicates an action completed momentarily. It does not emphasize the process of an action but the completion of it. “Fast,” on the other hand, indicates the speed of a process. The following are some examples.

He did a quick and dirty job. We don’t say “fast and dirty,” because the job must have been completed in a very short period of time, and the worker most likely did not pay much attention to the work process.

When dancing, we do “quick steps” but not “fast steps,” because these steps are taken in a very short movement and there’s not much of a process to talk about.

When we want immediate results, we say “quick”: Come here double quick (or on the double)! Again, we emphasize the completion of an action but not the speed or process.

As mentioned above, “fast” indicates process and speed. We say “fast cars” but not “quick cars,” because a car runs with a high speed. Similarly, we say: She’s a fast runner but not quick runner, because running is a process and reflects a speed.

In baseball, people say “fast balls” not “quick balls,” because the ball travels with a high speed, and it takes a while to reach the hitter from the pitcher.

Now the question is: which of the following is the right question—“how fast is quick” or “how quick is fast”?