

前言

文章来自《*经济学人*》的*如何与外星人交谈*。

虽然标题是如何与外星人交谈，也适合于不同语言使用者的沟通问题。

想象一下，你在某个欧洲的小镇上吃饭，服务员不会说英语，但是你想尽办法点了菜单上你认识的菜。

再比如出门远行走错了方向，误入亚马逊流域附近的小村庄。那里的人对你一无所知，你模仿咀嚼的声音，他们会以为你是不是舌头不对劲。你举手投降，他们会以为你在发起进攻。

正文

How to talk to aliens

The challenge says a lot about talk among people, too

001 Imagine dining in a European capital where you do not know the local language. The waiter speaks little English, but **by hook or by crook** you manage to order something on the menu that you recognise, eat and pay for. Now picture instead that, after a hike goes wrong, you emerge, starving, in an Amazonian village. The people there have no idea what to make of you. You mime chewing sounds, which they **mistake for** your primitive tongue. When you raise your hands to **signify** surrender, they think you are launching an attack.

by hook or by crook 不折手段，千方百计

● **By hook or by crook**, I hope that you will possess yourselves of money enough to travel and to idle, to contemplate the future or the past of the world, to dream over books and loiter at street corners and let the line of thought dip deep into the stream. (出自弗吉尼亚伍尔夫)

独立女性应该有闲暇时间，有一笔由她自己支配的钱，和一个属于她自己的房间。所以，去挣钱，去旅游，去阅读，去思索世界的未来或过去，沉湎在书本中或在街头闲荡。

● The famous singer is going to give a concert next week and his fans are trying to get a ticket **by hook or by crook**. 这位著名歌手将在下星期举行一次演唱会，他的歌迷们正**想方设法**搞票子。

● Since this was going to be the decisive game, they were determined to win it **by hook or by crook**. 因为这将是一场决定性的比赛，他们决心**不择手段**打赢它。

002 *Communicating without a shared context is hard*. For example, radioactive sites must be left undisturbed for tens of thousands of years; yet, given that the English of just 1,000 years ago is now **unintelligible** to most of its modern speakers, agencies have struggled to create warnings to accompany nuclear waste. Committees responsible for doing so have come up with everything from towering concrete spikes, to Edvard Munch's "The Scream", to plants genetically modified to turn an alarming blue. None is guaranteed to be **future-proof**.

unintelligible

● A judge in the high-profile anti-doping case involving Chinese Olympic swimmer Sun Yang has apologized for the translation services that rendered much of Sun's opening testimony **unintelligible**.

备受关注的中国奥运游泳运动员孙杨反兴奋剂案的一名法官为翻译服务表示道歉，因为翻译服务使得孙杨的开场证词很多都**难以理解**。

● Many speak mutually **unintelligible** languages of which there is often no written form. (出自**金融时报**)

很多《部落》之间往往语言**不通**，而且一般没有书面文字。

● Dorothy, meanwhile, no less struck by your appearance, gazes on you in great agitation, and drops a few **unintelligible** hints.

这当儿，Dorothy同样被你脸上的神色所吸引，惴惴不安地凝视着你，给你几个**捉摸不透**的暗示。

future-proof 不会过时，万无一失

● The only area of business that seems to be **recession-proof** is social media.

唯一能在经济危机中**抗衰退**的商业领域恐怕就只有社交媒体了吧。

● The only real way to ensure **fool-proof** privacy protection is not placing data online in the first place.

保证**万无一失**的隐私保护唯一真正有用的办法还是从一开始就不要把数据放到网上。

● The senators believe their bill may win enough votes to be **veto-proof**, and they could be right.

参议员们相信，他们的法案可能会赢得足够多的票数，使总统**无法否决**。他们的预测可能是对的。

003 Some of the same people who worked on these waste-site messages have also been part of an even bigger challenge: communicating with extraterrestrial life. This is the subject of “Extraterrestrial Languages”, a new book by Daniel Oberhaus, a journalist at Wired.

004 Nothing is known about how extraterrestrials might **take in** information. A pair of plaques sent in the early 1970s with Pioneer 10 and 11, two spacecraft, show nude human beings and a rough map to find Earth—rudimentary stuff, but even that assumes aliens can see. Since such craft **have no more than an infinitesimal chance** of being found, radio broadcasts from Earth, travelling at the speed of light, are more likely to make contact. But just as a terrestrial radio must be tuned to the right frequency, so must the interstellar kind. How would aliens happen upon the correct one? The Pioneer plaque **gives a hint** in the form of a basic diagram of a hydrogen

atom, the magnetic polarity of which flips at regular intervals, with a frequency of 1,420MHz. Since hydrogen is the most abundant element in the universe, the hope is that this sketch might act as a sort of telephone number.

take in 理解, 接受

● They listened to my lecture, but how much did they **take in**, I wonder.

他们听了我的课, 但是我不知道他们**领会**了多少。

● How much pleasure did they **take in** daily experiences such as talking with a friend, hearing a joke, or reading a magazine?

他们在日常生活中**得到**了多少快乐? 比如和朋友聊天、听到一个笑话、或者阅读杂志?

● Thenardier was one of those men who **take in** a situation at a glance. Thenardier是那样一个能一眼**认清**形势的人。

give a hint 暗示, 示意

● Can you **give a hint** about what this new project is going to be about?

你可以透露一点有什么新作品的**动向**吗?

● This is a parable that Matthew is putting in there, I think, to **give a hint** to his readers.

马太在这里使用这个比喻, 我想目的是给读者**一个提示**。

005 Assuming that human messages actually reach their target, what would **earthlings** and aliens talk about? The obvious subject to focus on is mathematics; its basic concepts are often assumed to be universal. Any intelligent species might have an interest in natural numbers (1, 2, 3 and so on) as well as things such as pi. *But moving beyond that to wider conversation would be far harder.* Scientists have worked on “self-interpreting” languages—written in a way that aims to teach the reader the language as they go—which might make the next steps possible.

earthling 地球人，凡夫俗子

-ling 名词后缀，表示「幼小」，「不重要」

● The adam, the **earthling**, male and female was made in the image of God.

而亚当，**凡人**，有男有女，是依照上帝的形象所造。

● Daisy the **duckling** becomes so engrossed in playing with dragonflies and lily pads that she temporarily loses her mother.

小鸭子 Daisy 是如此专心地跟蜻蜓和睡莲的叶子玩耍，以至于它一下子找不到它的妈妈了。

● The historian says 'it's great' Mr. Ross lives at home, and it's easy to understand why a **fledgling** ballplayer would want to.

这位历史学家认为，Ross 和家人在一起生活“很不错”，他非常理解一位**初出茅庐**的球员为什么会选择这种生活方式。

006 Is there any reason to think alien communication systems would share the two key design features of human language, words and grammar? A word like “book” is a symbol for all objects that exhibit bookish qualities; would aliens also **employ** symbols, rather than having separate names for every object in their world? Mr Oberhaus adduces arguments that they might. *Whatever type of society they inhabit, alien life-forms would have limited time and energy, as people do. It is efficient to use symbols. Similarly, human grammar allows a vast number of sentences to be made from a finite number of rules.* Any resource-constrained Moon-man might develop such grammar, too.

employ 使用

● Some of my girlfriends over the ensuing years might argue that it was a **technique** I continued to **employ** at times.

我以后的女朋友可能会评价说这是我惯**用**的伎俩

● Nadler also reacted to the president's statement that the United States will **not employ** torture in interrogations of suspected terrorists.

Nadler还对(奥巴马)总统有关美国在审讯恐怖分子嫌疑人的时候将**摒弃**酷刑手段的声明作出了回应。

● And once you over-learn whatever it is you're studying, you'll always be prepared to **employ** the information or skill at a moment's notice.

一旦你的“反复学习”恰巧就是你研究的东西，那么，你就可以随时在一瞬间**调遣**你的知识和技巧了。

007 Even if all such **hurdles** were overcome, however, distance would still be a problem. *Human children learn their first language by listening, trying it out and getting instant feedback. This give-and-take allows them to use fluent sentences by the age of four.* In 2015 the first known exoplanet at a “goldilocks” distance from its star (not too near and not too far), and with water, was discovered 110 light-years away. A message sent today would arrive in 2129; its reply, in 2239. *The kinds of exchanges depicted in sci-fi films would take lifetimes.*

hurdle 跨栏，障碍

● After the first step, you will naturally move to the next step, as the initial **hurdle** is always the highest, and things will begin to flow.

第一步后，你将自然地过渡到第二步，由于起步的**门槛**是最高的，接下来就会相对简单一些。

● High unemployment remains the biggest **hurdle** to a strong, steady recovery.

失业率居高不下，依然是(经济)强势稳定复苏的最大**障碍**。

● "The main **hurdle** was that they said I didn't have local experience, " Mr Atton says.

Atton说：“主要的**障碍**在于，他们说我没有本地经验。”

008 The **awesome** challenges of communicating across the galaxy mean that some think it not worth the effort—to say nothing of a political question raised by Mr Oberhaus: “Who speaks for Earth?” *But pondering these obstacles raises another thought, not about aliens but what humanity has in common.* Linguists argue about whether languages share universal features or are unique products of local cultures; whatever the answer, the world’s 7,000-odd tongues are vastly closer to one another than anything to be found out there.

awesome 可怕的

-**some** 形容词后缀，表示「引起~的」

bothersome 烦人的 **troublesome** 令人烦恼的

● One awesome gadget or tool is often better than five mediocre ones.

一件了不起的小玩意或是工具通常比五件普通的要好。

● It may feel a little **bothersome** in the beginning, but that goes away when you start seeing how this tiny habit can affect your life.

也许这在开始时比较麻烦，不过当你开始看到这种小习惯能对你的人生产生影响时就不会有这种感觉了。

● The company soon realized she had an unusual knack for identifying extremely low levels of **troublesome** chemicals.

该公司很快就意识到，在识别极低水平的不良化学成份方面，她拥有不寻常的能力。