

III. MEASURE WORDS

A. Characteristics:

1. Measure words (M) are a grammatical necessity in linking a specifier and/or quantifier with a noun. They can also be used in measuring function verbs (to measure the number of occurrences, time duration, etc., cf. B.9)
2. Measure words are front-bound, i.e., must be preceded by a specifier and/or number.
3. With the exception of "verbal measures" and "quasi measures," the measure word is followed by a noun, either explicitly or implicitly.

B. Types:

1. C Classifiers (numeral classifiers): The most common kind of M have no semantic content, but are related to the shape, kind, or some other property of the associated nouns. While they are rare in English ("a *head* of cattle," "a *loaf* of bread"), they are a required grammatical category in Chinese.

The word order involving measure words is: Sp-Nu-M-N

一本书 一张桌子 一枝铅笔 一只猫 一头牛 一条鱼

If a N has more than one meaning (even though the different meanings differ only in nuance), the C measure used with it will indicate which meaning is intended. This point is actually circular: one might also say it's the different C measures that impart the different meaning to the same N:

一道门 (doorway) 一扇门 (the door itself)
一门课 (a course) 一节课 (a class session) (see also B.10)
一颗心 (heart, emotions) 一片好心 (pure, consistent intention)
一条心 (aspiration, desire, will, e.g. 全体一条心 "united in aspiration")

2. C' Classifiers associated with V-O compounds: Differs from C only in that the M is associated with the V as well as the O, and therefore the M may vary depending on the meaning of the V-O. In other words, the M is not a measure of the N per se, but of the V-O.

说一句英语 说一句漂亮的英语 说一大通英语 说了一番真心话
写一手好字 写一笔好字 当两任总统 打了三局球 坐一趟火车

3. Q Quantifiers (units of measure): Quantifiers measure length, weight, distance, etc., and have parallels in English. The N logically associated with the M is often unstated, e.g.:

八十英里(路) 三十六度(温度)

This type of Nu-M is also frequently followed by a SV like 高、长、重, e.g.:

两米(高) 五十斤(重) 三英尺(长)

In a sentence about the size, height, weight etc. of a certain thing, the correct verb is 有 and *not* 是, e.g.:

not: 他是六英尺高。 but: 他有六英尺高。

4. Nu Numerical measures: 百、千、万、亿. These round numbers are like Ms in three ways:
- a) they are bound forms.
 - b) when preceded by the number 2, 两 as well as 二 can be used. (In the standard Sp- Nu-M-N pattern, if the Nu is 2, it is normally expressed by 两 and not 二. Cf. IV.1.)
 - c) With a limited number of nouns (人、学生) preceded by a large round number, the Nu-M serves the grammatical function of both Nu and M, and no additional M is needed, e.g. 三百(个)人、五千(个)学生。

Abbreviated round numbers: The last round numerical measure (千、百、十) or a quantifier measure (e.g. 毛、公分) is often omitted in colloquial speech, and is understood to be the next unit down from the immediately preceding M.

一千五百 / 一千五: 一千五 vs. 一千零五
房租一个月要三千五(百)(元)。
电影票八块五(毛)一张。
身高一米八(十)(公分)够不够高?

Pitfall: The large round numbers 万 (10,000) and 亿 (100,000,000) require some mental gymnastics when translating between Chinese and English.

5. Ct Containers (called "temporary M" in some mainland Chinese grammar books): Like the Q type, the Ct also actually measures objects, but it does so through "containers," which are usually 3-dimensional, but can also be 2-dimensional. Ct measures are derived from nouns, which usually have the suffix 子 in its nominal form (e.g. 两杯水 vs. 两个杯子).

三箱旧衣服 一盒饼乾 一袋苹果 一床被窝
一桌菜 (a banquet with X number of courses served to one tableful of guests)

6. G Groups: the G measure implies some unit more than one, and have parallels in English.

一排杨树 一套书 一种植物 一批货
一帮流氓 (note unusual meaning of 帮) 一对双胞胎

Pitfall: "Pair" is translated into different Chinese measure words depending on the noun being measured: 一对夫妻、一副眼镜、一副手套、一双鞋子、一条裤子

7. P Partitives: grammatically the same as G measures, but semantically the opposite.

这些杂志 一部份人 这段文字 一滴水 一片面包

8. T Temporary measures (nouns): Like Ct measures, T measures are also nouns, but they are not actually used to measure things, but rather used figuratively, implying "all over, filled with..." T measures are often borrowed from nouns directly and therefore may be two syllables (vs. Ct measures which are usually one syllable). The Nu preceding a T measure is always 一 (meaning "whole/all," as in 一天到晚, and is therefore actually a pseudo number), and 一- T-N is synonymous with 满-T(的)N. Sometimes, there is a preference for either 一- T-N or 满-T(的)N; sometimes only one of the two is idiomatically acceptable.

一身债 一头白发 一鼻子灰 一地垃圾 一桌子废纸 (compare with 一桌菜)
一院子落叶 一肚子气 (not 满肚子气) 满腔热情 (not 一腔热情)

9. V Verbal measures: V measures quantify actions and follow verbs. They are generally not followed by nouns. If a V measure is followed by a N, that N is usually the object of the V and not something quantified by the M.

看一眼 叫一声“奶奶” 打了两巴掌
劝了一番 谈一下功课 去了一趟日本

10. Qs Quasi measures: Qs measures are like nouns semantically, and generally translate into "quantity-nouns" in English. But we call them Qs measures in Chinese because they function like Ms in that they follow specifiers and/or numbers directly, without another intervening M. A Qs measure is not preceded by another M, nor does it precede a N to quantify it.

那年 几岁 头等 四代同堂 当天 各处
这本书有十五课 (课 also functions as a N, cf. near end of section B.1.)

C. Pitfalls:

1. Forgetting to insert an M when it serves no semantic function. The C type is particularly prone to this pitfall.
2. Associating the wrong M with the given N, especially when the noun is used in its abstract sense (一番话、一席话、一条心、一片好心). Sometimes the matching is simply by custom rather than logic (e.g. the different measure words for "pair," cf. B.6.). See "Measure Word Associations" for examples.
3. Over-using the generic M 个, e.g. *一个自行车 (should be 一辆自行车 or 一部自行车)
4. Misconstruing a Q measure, Nu measure, or a Qs measure as noun, and adding another M in front of it.

斤、尺、寸、公里 : not 三个公里 (should be 三公里)
百、千、万、亿 : not 两个万 (should be 两万)

There is an exception with the numerical measure 亿: the generic measure word 个 can be added to highlight the nuance of "large round number," e.g. 投资了五十个亿。

年、周、天 (mis-analogy with 月 and 星期; 月 and 星期 are nouns, whereas 年、周、天 are measure words):

not 三个年、前四个天, but 三年、前四天

D. The two lists appended to this lesson serve the following functions:

1. The "Measure Word Associations" gives you a good idea of what nouns the most common measure words are coupled with.
2. The "List of Measure Words" can be used for review of measure words that you have already learned. As for the rather infrequent measure words that you have not yet learned, you may just bypass them for now. For exercise, make up a phrase - similar to the examples in this lesson - for each of the measure words that you have already learned.

E. Useful references (all available in IUP Reading Room):

1. 现代汉语学习词典: Gives measure words for nouns within the glosses.
2. 汉英双解词典: Has an appendix called 常用量词表, which includes explanations or English equivalents, and examples.
3. 现代汉语八百词: Has table of nouns and the various measures that each co-occurs with.
4. 现代汉语名词量词搭配词典 (浙江教育出版社, 1989): a dictionary of co-occurrences between nouns and measure words.

MEASURE WORD ASSOCIATIONS

Some measure words have wide-ranging usage, some are used only in limited ways.

I. Measures of nouns:

笔	bǐ	一笔钱
部	bù	一部电影、一部小说、一部自行车
场	chǎng	一场雨、一场病、一场战争、一场灾难、一场演出、一场电影、一场比赛
串	chuàn	一串钥匙、一串珍珠、一串羊肉、一串铃声、一串问题、一串笑声
道	dào	一道光、一道皱纹、一道门、一道题、一道手续、一道命令
滴	dī	一滴水
堆	duī	一堆土、一堆雪、一堆垃圾
对	duì	一对枕头、一对夫妻、一对新人
顿	dùn	一顿饭、一顿批评、一顿打
份	fèn	一份快餐、一份礼物、一份材料、一份杂志、一份工作、一份心意
幅	fú	一幅画 (limited)
副	fù	一副手套、一副眼镜、一副牌、一副冷面孔、一副笑脸、一副俊模样
架	jià	一架飞机、一架钢琴、一架照相机
件	jiàn	一件衬衣、一件礼物、一件事儿
届	jiè	第五届会议、这届领导、首届毕业生
卷	juǎn	一卷画儿、一卷行李、一卷手纸
类	lèi	这类问题、这类人物、这类事情
缕	lǚ	一缕头发
枚	méi	一枚铜钱、一枚勋章 (limited)
批	pī	一批工人、一批产品、一批货
篇	piān	一篇作文、一篇论文、一篇故事
群	qún	一群人、一群羊、一群孩子、一群海岛、一群动物
束	shù	一束鲜花、一束信件
双	shuāng	一双筷子、一双袜子、一双鞋、一双眼睛
摊	tān	一摊泥、一摊血、一摊工作、一摊事
套	tào	一套房间
条	tiáo	一条领带、一条路、一条船、一条消息、一条新闻、一条要求、一条说明
团	tuán	一团线、一团纸、一团火
位	wèi	一位客人
项	xiàng	一项内容、一项声明、一项工作、一项任务
盏	zhǎn	一盏灯 (very limited)
张	zhāng	一张票、一张煎饼、一张嘴、一张脸、一张网
阵	zhèn	一阵风、一阵掌声、一阵雨
桩	zhuāng	一桩事情 (very limited)

II. Measures of verbs:

顿	dùn	打一顿、骂一顿、批评一顿
番	fān	议论一番、讨论一番、表示一番、整理一番
趟	tàng	来一趟、跑一趟、买一趟东西、去一趟厕所
下	xià	来一下、找一下、介绍一下

III. Indefinite Measures:

点儿	diǎr	一点儿钱、一点儿意思、一点儿表示、谨慎一点儿、注意一点儿、这么一点儿
些	xiē	一些水、一些报纸、一些意见、那些年、客气些、安心了一些、多些、严格些

LIST OF MEASURE WORDS

The relative rankings of measure words are given in the third column: B (basic), I (intermediate), and A (advanced).

The fourth column lists the types of measure words, as follows:

C: Classifiers (numeralives)	P: Partitives
C': Classifiers associated with V-O compounds	T: Temporary measures (nouns)
Q: Quantifiers	V: Verbal measures
Ct: Containers	Qs: Quasi measures
G: Groups	

For some measure words, the type given is not absolute. That is, some may be used in more than one sense, each falling into a different type, e.g. 头: 一头牛 C, 一头污水 Qs; and some simply fall in between two types, e.g. 卷 "a roll of..." G/Ct. The classifications of measure words are given to help you understand what they mean, how they are used, what grammatical restrictions there are. It is not important that you know which classification each measure word belongs to, as long as you can use it correctly. In fact, there are different ways to classify measure words. Some grammar books in main-land China categorize measure words into just four types: noun measures, verb measures, temporary measures (= T and Ct types in our system), and indefinite (quantity) measures (e.g. 一些, 一点儿).

This list is rather comprehensive, though not exhaustive, especially in the categories of quasi-measures and verb-measures.

量词	pinyin	rank	type	顿	dùn	B	V	块	kuài	B	C,Q	所	suǒ	I	C
巴掌	bāzhang	A	V	朵	duǒ	I	C	类	lèi	I	G	台	tái	I	C
把	bǎ	B	C	番	fān	A	V	厘米	lícmǐ	I	Q	摊	tān	A	Ct
班	bān	B	G	分	fēn	B	Q	里	lǐ	B	Q	趟	tàng	I	V
帮	bāng	A	G	份	fèn	I	C	粒	lì	I	C	套	tào	I	G
磅	bàng	A	Q	封	fēng	B	C	两	liǎng	I	Q	条	tiáo	B	C
包	bāo	I	Ct	幅	fú	I	C	辆	liàng	B	C	头	tóu	B	C,Qs
杯	bēi	B	Ct	副	fù	I	G	列	liè	I	Qs	团	tuán	I	G
倍	bèi	B	Q	个	ge	B	C	缕	lǚ	I	G	碗	wǎn	B	C
辈	bèi	A	Qs	根	gēn	B	C	毛	máo	B	Q	位	wèi	B	C
本	běn	B	C	公斤	gōngjīn	B	Q	枚	méi	A	C	屋子	wūzi	B	Qs
笔	bǐ	B	G	公里	gōnglǐ	B	Q	门	mén	B	C	下	xià	B	V
遍	biàn	B	V	公顷	gōngqǐng	A	Q	米	mǐ	B	Q	箱	xiāng	A	Ct
部	bù	I	P	股	gǔ	A	C	面	miàn	I	Qs	项	xiàng	I	Qs
册	cè	I	Qs	锅	guō	B	C	秒	miǎo	I	Q	些	xiē	B	P
层	céng	B	P	行	háng	I	G	名	míng	I	C	眼	yǎn	B	V
场	chǎng	B	C'	毫米	háomǐ	A	Q	亩	mǔ	I	Q	样	yàng	I	G
车	chē	B	Ct	号	hào	B	Qs	排	pái	I	G	元	yuán	B	Q
成	chéng	I	Q	盒	hé	I	Ct	盘	pán	I	Ct	院子	yuànzi	I	N
尺	chǐ	I	Q	回	huí	B	V	盆	pén	B	C	盏	zhǎn	A	C
串	chuàn	A	G	伙	huǒ	A	G	批	pī	I	G	张	zhāng	B	C
次	cì	B	V	家	jiā	B	G	匹	pǐ, pī	I	C	章	zhāng	I	Qs
簇	cù	A	G	架	jià	I	C	篇	piān	B	C	丈	zhàng	I	Q
寸	cùn	I	Q	间	jiān	B	C	片	piàn	B	C	阵	zhèn	I	Qs
撮	cuō	I	G	件	jiàn	B	C	瓶	píng	B	Ct	支	zhī	B	C
袋	dài	I	Ct	角	jiǎo	B	Q	期	qī, qí	I	Qs	只	zhī	B	C
刀	dāo	B	V	脚	jiǎo	B	N,V	起	qǐ	A	C'	枝	zhī	A	C
道	dào	B	C	节	jié	B	C'	千克	qiānkè	A	Q	纸	zhǐ	A	C
滴	dī	I	P	届	jiè	I	Qs	拳	quán	I	V	种	zhǒng	B	G
点	diǎn	B	P	斤	jīn	B	Q	群	qún	I	G	株	zhū	I	C
顶	dǐng	A	C	句	jù	B	C'	身	shēn	I	N	桩	zhuàng	A	C'
度	dù	I	Qs	卷	juǎn	A	Ct	声	shēng	B	V	幢	zhuàng	A	C
肚子	dùzi	B	N	棵	kē	B	C	首	shǒu	I	C	桌	zhuō	B	C
段	duàn	B	P	颗	kē	I	C	手	shǒu	B	C'	座	zuò	B	C
堆	duī	A	G	刻	kè	B	Q	束	shù	A	G				
对	duì	I	G	克	kè	B	Q	双	shuāng	B	G				
吨	dūn	I	Q	口	kǒu	B	C'	岁	suì	B	Qs				

