

## VI: MODIFICATION OF ACTION, COMMAND AND REQUEST

1. Modification of action (description of action, "manner") by using a *verb complement*, to describe the process or the result:

When the FV has no object:

FV 得 + verb complement

When the FV has an object:

FV-O FV 得 + verb complement or O FV 得 + verb complement

but not: FV-O 得 + verb complement (see faulty examples below)

The above patterns apply to modification of *action*, and "action" implies that the verb is a *functive verb* (FV).

Pitfall: Since many verbs in English translate into V-O in Chinese, the unwary non-native is prone to treat the V-O as though it's just a bisyllabic FV, leading to flawed sentences like those in the following examples.

Describing the process:

他说话说得很慢。 他说得很慢。(in answer to: 他说话说得怎么样?)  
他说汉语说得很慢。 他汉语说得很慢。 but not: 他说汉语得很慢。

Describing the result:

他洗衣服洗得很干净。 他洗得很干净。(in answer to: 他洗衣服洗得怎么样?)  
他衣服洗得很干净。 but not: 他洗衣服得很干净。

Describing the process as well as the result:

这位老师讲课讲得很清楚。 这位老师课讲得很清楚。  
but not: 这位老师讲课得很清楚。

The description can apply to the person's habitual manner of doing something or a specific instance of it.

他走路走得很慢。(habitual) but not: 他走路得很慢。  
他老了，所以走路走得很慢。(habitual) but not: 他老了，所以走路得很慢。  
他今天不舒服，所以走路走得很慢。(specific instance)

2. Description of action by verb-complements contrasted with using adverbs (……地 FV):

- a. 李老师今天讲课讲得很清楚。(specific instance)(using verb complement)  
李老师今天很清楚地讲了这一课的生词。(specific instance) (using adverb)  
李老师讲课讲得很清楚。(habitual) (using verb complement)  
but not: 李老师很清楚地讲课。  
(the adverbial pattern cannot be applied to habitual action)

Compare the usage of the two patterns when applied to a specific instance:

Using a verb complement: 李老师今天讲课讲得很清楚。

Using an adverb: 李老师今天很清楚地讲了这一课的生词。

The first sentence focuses on the "manner," and tells *how the teacher conducted his lecture today*. The second sentence doesn't focus on the manner, but tells *what the teacher did today* (he lectured on the vocabulary of this lesson), *and (incidentally) he did it very clearly*.

- b. 昨天我们玩儿得很高兴。 (specific instance of past event) (using verb complement)  
昨天我们高高兴兴地玩儿了一天。 (specific instance of past event) (using adverb)  
我们明天要高高兴兴地去玩儿一天。 (specific instance of future event) (using adverb)  
but not: 我们明天要玩儿得很高兴。 (the verb-complement pattern, while not outright incorrect, is not commonly used with the future because its meaning is counter-logical)

Compare the usage of the two patterns when applied to a specific instance in the past:

昨天我们玩儿得很高兴。                      You had an outing yesterday, eh? *How did it go?*  
昨天我们高高兴兴地玩儿了一天。 *What did you do yesterday?*

Both refer to a specific instance that occurred yesterday, but the verb complement pattern focuses on the manner of a given event, the adverbial pattern - if it focuses on anything at all - focuses on "what happened, what did you do."

3. Verb-complement pattern in the negative. In the description of manner in which something occurs, the action or event is a *given*, so it cannot be negated. What can be negated is in the manner, so the negative 不 or 没 is inserted in the verb complement and not in front of the main verb.

他唱歌唱得不好听。                      but not: 他唱歌不唱得好听。 nor 他不唱歌得好听。  
那位老师讲课讲得没有意思。 but not: 那位老师不讲课讲得有意思。  
nor: 那位老师不讲课得有意思。

Note how these sentences would be said in English:

He doesn't sing well. (He sings alright, but not well.)  
That teacher doesn't lecture interestingly. (The professor lectures, but not interestingly.)

Because in English the negative is applied to the verb and not to the description of manner - which is counter-logical - there is the temptation to apply the same "illogical" word order in Chinese.

4. Additional difference in verb modification between using verb complement and adverbial modifier:

Using verb complement:	Using adverb:
她把那件事讲得很详细。	她详细地告诉了我那件事。
那个故事，他讲得太动人了。	他很动人地讲了那个故事。
他洗衣服洗得很干净。	But not: 他很干净地洗了衣服。
你写字写得真漂亮！	But not: 你真漂亮地写了这些字！

In the first two sentences, the modifier modifies the *manner* of the action (i.e. the process); in

the latter two sentences, the modifier modifies the *result*. The verb complement form may be used to modify both the process and the result, *but the adverbial modifier may only be used to modify the process, not the result*.

5. "Degree" of nominal modification. The following pattern is used to describe the degree to which the subject is a certain way :

Subj. SV 得 + complement of degree

忙得很	忙得不得了	忙得不可开交	忙得我受不了了	忙得连吃饭的时间都没有
贵极了	贵得不得了	贵得可怕	贵得没人买得起	贵得无法形容

6. "Degree" of modification with verb complement modification. These two patterns are used to describe the degree to which the subject does something in a certain manner:

Subj. FV 得 SV 得 + complement of degree

Subj. FV 得 很 SV, SV 得 + complement of degree

(the SV in these two patterns is the manner in which the subject does something)

Modification with verb complement but without "degree" (description of manner, cf. #1):

老师说得很快。 老师说得快极了。

To the above example sentences, add the "complement of degree" to the description of manner using the two patterns above:

老师说得快得不得了。 老师说得快得没人能听懂。 老师说得快得学生都没听懂。  
他说得很快，快得没人能听懂。 他说得很快，快得学生都没听懂。

Modification with verb complement but without "degree" (description of manner, cf. #1):

他中文说得很好。 他中文说得简直跟中国人一样。

To the above example sentence, add the "complement of degree" to the description of manner using the two patterns above:

他中文说得好得简直跟中国人一样。  
他中文说得很好，好得简直跟中国人一样。

More examples of describing an action coupled with "complement of degree":

他开车开得快得没人敢坐他的车。  
她打扫得很干净，干净得连一点儿灰尘都没有。

7. Command and request that something be done in a certain manner.

SV pertains to either the process or the result:

(请你) FV SV 一点儿

SV pertains only to the process (e.g. 快、慢、早、晚、大声), not the result:

(请你) SV 一点儿 FV

In a command or request, if the modifier can be conceived of as the result of the action (rather than the process), then it must follow the verb (first pattern above), i.e., the second pattern is no good.

"Process" is involved (both patterns acceptable):

请你明天早一点儿来。	请你明天来早一点儿。
你能不能慢一点儿说。	你能不能说慢一点儿。
我没听见，请大声一点儿说。	我没听见，请说大声一点儿。

"Result" is involved (modifier must follow the verb):

你能不能说清楚一点儿。	but not: 你能不能清楚一点儿说。
请洗干净一点儿。	but not: 请干净一点儿洗。

The logic is: result comes after the action. In the sentence 你能不能说清楚一点儿, 清楚 can apply to both the process and the result, but since it can be conceived of as the result of the action, it must follow the verb (i.e. may not precede the verb as in the preceding three sentences above).

In a command or request, when the complement follows the verb, the 得 is usually omitted, although not omitting 得 is grammatically acceptable in most cases.

请你明天来早一点儿。	also acceptable: 请你明天来得早一点儿。
你能不能说慢一点儿。	also acceptable: 你能不能说得慢一点儿。
请洗干净一点儿。	also acceptable: 请洗得干净一点儿。
你能不能说清楚一点儿。	also acceptable: 你能不能说得清楚一点儿。

In cases where the modifier refers to the process and can either precede or follow the verb, it will precede the verb if the verb carries an object.

No object involved: 请你明天早一点儿来。 or 请你明天来早一点儿。

Object involved: 请你明天早一点儿来学校。

but not: 请你明天来早一点儿学校。 nor 请你明天来学校早一点儿。

No object involved: 你能不能慢一点儿开。 or 你能不能开慢一点儿。

Object involved: 你能不能慢一点儿开车。

but not: 你能不能开慢一点儿车。 nor 你能不能开车慢一点儿。