

X. TIME-WHEN, TIME-SPAN, AND OCCURRENCES

1. The distinction between "time-when" (point in time) and "time-span" (duration of time) is crucial in determining the word order of time expressions in Chinese. In English, there is a great deal of flexibility in word order for both kinds of time expressions, and grammatically there is no difference between them, therefore "thinking in English" is likely to result in wrong word order in Chinese. E.g.

Next year I'm going to Japan to study. (While the time-when expression "next year"
I'm going next year to Japan to study. can be located in four different places in the
I'm going to Japan next year to study. English sentence, there are only two
correct I'm going to Japan to study next year. places to locate 明年 in the
equivalent Chinese sentence.)

2. Time-when expressions follow the word order of MA (movable adverb) in Chinese, i.e., before or after the subject, but always before the verb:

(time-when) Subj. (time-when) predicate

明年我要去日本留学。 我明年要去日本留学。 but not 我要去日本留学明年。
中国在七十年代的时候还没有「一胎化」政策。
在七十年代的时候中国还没有「一胎化」政策。
刚到北京的那几天我不怎么想家，第二个星期我才开始想家的。
我刚到北京的那几天不怎么想家，我第二个星期才开始想家的。
我们每年十一月举行一次汉语教学研讨会。【研讨会：academic conference】
每年十一月(我们)举行一次汉语教学研讨会。

3. Time-span as measure of duration of an event or action follows the verb. The event or action can be already completed or in prospect:

Subj. verb T-span (in this pattern, the verb has no object)

那个世界妇女大会举行了三个星期。
每年一次的那个汉语教学研讨会只举行三天。
我小时候在台湾住了四年。
这次你预备在日本待多长时间？

If the verb has an object, and the V-O combination indicates an action, then the time-span is conceptualized as a quantifier of the action. In that case, the time-span expression never follows the V-O combination, but rather the following sentence patterns may be used:

Subj. V (了) time-span O.
Subj. V-O V(了) time-span.
(preposed obj.) Subj. (preposed obj.) V(了) time-span.
(preposed obj. may precede or follow the Subj.)
but not * Subj. V-O (了) time-span.

她教了二十年汉语。 她教汉语教了二十年。

她汉语教了二十年。 汉语她教了二十年。
她预备教一辈子汉语。(in prospect)
but not 她教汉语了二十年 nor 教了汉语二十年

昨天是星期天，可是我没怎么休息…
我做了一整天家务。
我做家务做了一整天。
我家务做了一整天。(marginal)
家务我做了一整天。(marginal)
but not 我做家务了一整天。 nor 我做了家务一整天。

明天是星期天，但是我得做一整天(的)家务。(in prospect)

4. In contrast to the V-O combination *indicating action*, the V-O combination that *indicates an event or a mental state* stays together when followed by a time-span expression *indicating the amount of time that has lapsed or will lapse since the event has occurred or the duration of the mental state* (i.e. the time-span expression follows the V-O). I.e., time-span as measure of time lapsed since an event or duration of a mental state is expressed by the following pattern:

V-O time-span

我离开家三年了，可是还是每天都想家。 but not 离开三年家
(离开家 is an event, and 三年 is the amount of time that has lapsed since that event)

他们成家二十年，关系一直很好，怎么突然要离婚了呢？ not 成二十年家
(成家 is an event, and 二十年 is the amount of time that has lapsed since that event)

他们打算先去加拿大几年……（然后再看） not 去几年加拿大
(去加拿大 is an event in prospect)

我和她结婚就是要爱她一辈子。(爱她 is a mental state)
我和她结婚就是要一辈子(都)爱她。(一辈子 is treated as a time-when expression here)
but not 我和她结婚就是要爱一辈子她。

5. Time-when is not always just a *point* in time (a single moment), it sometimes *appears* to be a time-span expression in that it indicates a certain duration of time. The test is whether the time expression focuses on "when something occurs" or "for how long the event/action lasts."

这三十多年来 IUP 培训了差不多两千个学生。(这三十多年来 "in the last thirty-IUP 这三十多年来培训了差不多两千个学生。 some years" is a time-when expression)

IUP 已经办了三十年了。 (三十多年 is duration of IUP's existence)

Is there any difference between the two sentences in the following pairs?

我吃素吃了十年了。【吃素：eat no meat】
(duration of activity: I've been a vegetarian for 10 years now.)

我吃素十年了。

(time lapse since activity began: It's been ten years since I became vegetarian.)

他吸了几年毒？【吸毒：take drugs】

(duration of activity: How many years was he on drugs?)

他吸毒几年了？

(time lapse since activity began: How many years has it been since he started taken drugs?)

6. Time-span as measure of time lapse *without* a certain action/event occurring: In this case, the time-span expression *precedes* the verb phrase:

(Subj.) time-span 不/没 VP...

他病得很厉害，三天没吃饭了。

要是三天不喝水，就活不了了。

这里已经三个月没下雨了。

我吃素已经十年了，也就是说我十年没吃肉了。

老板三年没给大家加薪了，所以这次加薪加得特别多。

【老板：boss; 加薪：to increase salary】

7. A review point (Lesson VII, 7b, 9a, 9b): The Sentence-了 in a sentence that contains a time-span expression brings the action or situation up to the present, and indicates that the action or situation is on-going. Without the Sentence-了, the action or situation has been concluded after a certain duration.

他吸毒吸了十年，今年终于戒毒了。 他吸毒吸了十年了，一直没法子戒(毒)。

这里三年没下雨，今年一下就造成了水灾！

这里三年没下雨了，农民只好到城里打工去了。

火车票十年没涨价，这次一涨就涨了一倍！ (situation over)

老板三年没给大家加薪了，有办法的人都找别的工作去了。(on-going situation)

8. Time by the clock also distinguishes between time-when (point in time) and time-span (amount of time).

a) Point in time.

早上七点(钟) 中午十二点 八点正 (or 准) 清晨四点

三点多 三点半 三点三十(分)

三点(过)二十(分) 三点(过)一刻 三点三刻 三点零五分(零 used for up to 9 min.)

两点差十分 差十分两点 两点差一刻 差一刻两点 but not 过一刻三点

(note: a small amount of time short of a certain hour may precede or follow the hour)

b) Amount of time.

几个 钟头/小时 半个 钟头/小时 两分钟 三刻钟 三个半/多 钟头/小时

四个 钟头/小时(零)二十五分 (钟) 四个 钟头/小时(零)一刻 (钟)

四个 钟头/小时 差十五分 (钟) 四个 钟头/小时 差一刻 (钟)

差 一刻/十五分 四个 钟头/小时 but not 零/过 一刻/十五分 四个 钟头/小时

(note: a small amount of time short of a whole hour may precede or follow the whole hour)

Clock time words:

点、分、刻 are measure words, numbers precede them directly.

钟头、小时、钟 (e.g. 三分钟) are nouns, a M must be added between the Nu and the N.

Words that denote a segment of time (清晨、早上、上午、下午、晚上) can be added to a clock-measured point in time, and they are added in front because they denote larger units, e.g. 清晨五点、早上八点、晚上七点。

Words that denote specific points in time may be added in front of clock-measured point in time to modify it (in this case, to further clarify), e.g. 中午十二点、凌晨四点。

9. Expressions that denote relative points in times (time-when, relative to the present or some other point in time):

- a. *Independent* relative time-when words (used without a reference point in time):

从前、以前、后来、以后、然后。Grammatically they are MA's.

我从前/以前只懂摇滚音乐。后来，我也学会欣赏古典音乐了。

【摇滚音乐: rock and roll; 欣赏: appreciate; 古典: classical】

她三年前和一位音乐家结了婚。以后她就不再喜欢摇滚音乐了。

从前、以前、后来、以后: As adverbs indicating time, 从前 and 以前 are interchangeable (but only 以前 can be used in a relative time clause, cf. below), but there is a shade of difference between 后来 and 以后: 后来 simply means "later on," whereas 以后 means "thereafter," linking it to a particular event in the past or possibly in the future (cf. the two example sentences above).

然后 is a word that is often confused with 后来 and 以后. 然后 is used in the second clause of a two-clause sentence (or in the second of two closely linked sentences), to indicate a *consequential* as well as temporal relationship between the two clauses, whereas 后来 and 以后 indicate a temporal (subsequent) relationship. The event introduced by 然后 may or may not occur immediately following the preceding event, but the time lapse is usually small, whereas the time lapse in a sentence introduced by 后来 or 以后 may be quite big.

他进了戒毒院，然后很快就戒毒了。

他去年戒了毒，出了戒毒院，以后/后来怎么样，我就知道了。

她离开了那个歧视妇女的工作环境，然后就自己开了一个公司。

她要离开那个歧视妇女的工作环境，可是不知道以后该怎么样发展自己的事业。

- b. Points in time *relative* to an event: ……以前 / 以后 / 的时候 / 的那天 / etc. These "relational words" are tagged on to the end of the relevant events:

他被老板解雇的那天，就马上找到了一个更好的工作。【解雇: to fire】

我上大学以前，只喜欢摇滚音乐。上过一门音乐欣赏课以后，我就对什么音乐都感兴趣了。

我心愤不好的时候，就会想听一听贝多芬的第九交响曲。

【贝多芬: Beethoven; 交响曲: symphony】

以前 and 以后, aside from relating to specific events, can relate to time-spans as well, e.g. 三天以前、半个小时以后。

10. Number of occurrences: Grammatically, the word order is the same as "time-span" expressions, i.e., the number of occurrences follows the verb. If a V-O is involved, it follows the patterns indicated in point 3.

他来了两次。 but not 他两次来了

打电话打了三次 打了三次电话 but not 打了电话三次

每一课的录音带，我都得听三次。 这一课的录音带，我只听了两次。
but not 我只听了这一课的录音带两次。

老师已经解释了三遍了，你怎么还不明白呢？

我考大学考了三次才考上了。 but not 我考大学了三次才考上了。

为了教育孩子方法不同，他们争吵过好几次。 【争吵: to argue】

11. Specific occurrences: Grammatically, the word order is the same as "time-when" expressions, i.e., the specific occurrence (singular or plural) occupies the position of a MA. Specific occurrences is usually - but not always - preceded by a specifier or the ordinal number prefix 第.

他第一次来中国是为了留学。

他这次来中国是为了发展他的事业。 but not 他来这次，……

我第一次回忆童年还是刚进大学不久的时候。

请同学们下次上课的时候谈一谈自己的童年。

他头两次来中国，都是跟着父母来的，这次来是他第一次自己一个人来。

(note plural number of times, which is still "specific occurrences" and not "number of occurrences")

Pitfall: Sometimes what appears to be a case of number of occurrences is actually specific occurrences. This is similar to the phenomenon described in point 5.

他(那)两次来，我都不在家。(specific occurrences)

她来过两次，可是我都不在家。(number of occurrences)

他们好几次争吵，都是为了教育孩子方法不同。(specific occurrences)

(The several times they argued were all due to disagreement over child-rearing methods.)