

XI. COVERBS AND POSTVERBS (PREPOSITIONS IN ENGLISH)

1. Coverbs (CV's) in Chinese have the function of prepositions in English in that they indicate some circumstance that accompanies the main verb. While Chinese CV's and English prepositions share the characteristic of carrying objects, they differ in two major ways:
 - a. In English, prepositions and verbs are two totally different classes of words. In Chinese, all CV's are historically derived from verbs, and most of them still function as verbs as well as CV's in modern Chinese. Often only context can tell whether the word in question is functioning as a CV or as a verb.
 - b. CV's in Chinese always precede the verb, whereas prepositions in English mostly follow the verb. A few of the CV's can also function as postverbs (PV's). CV's are much more common than PV's in Chinese.

The most common CV's in the spoken language are: 从、在、到、往、靠、跟、对、给、替、用、把、被（让、叫）。Some of these words are used equally frequently as verbs or CV's (e.g. 在、到、靠), some are used primarily as verbs and secondarily as CV's (e.g. 给、用、叫), some are used primarily as CV's and only sometimes as verbs (e.g. 往、跟、对、替、把)。Only 从 and 被 are used exclusively as CV's in modern Chinese. Of the CV's listed above, 把 and 被 have important special usage, and will be singled out for discussion later.

Examples of words used both as verbs and as CV's:

他到了。	他 <u>到上海</u> 去了。
别给孩子那么多糖。	别给孩子 <u>买</u> 那么多糖。
你会用电脑吗？	你会 <u>用电脑</u> 打中文吗？
没有人能替你。	没有人能 <u>替你</u> 做这件事。
别老跟着我。	请 <u>跟着</u> 我说。

Examples of CV's: Subj. CV-O VP.

你学过五年中文了，我才学过两年，我怎么能跟你比呢？
那么脏的衣服，用什么洗都洗不干净了。
你到了以后，请马上给我打一个电话。
这个朋友对我真不错，他常常替我解决问题。

(The main verb following 对我 is a SV rather than FV. This is unusual. What follows a CV-O is usually a FV.)

Pitfalls:

- a. Can't tell if a word in itself is a V or CV, must see context.
- b. Tendency to follow word order of English prepositions and put CV in PV position:

wrong: 他去跟我	✓他跟我去
wrong: 他很好对我	✓他对我很好
wrong: 我来从美国	✓我从美国来
wrong: 在美国我们不吃饭用筷子	✓在美国我们不用筷子吃饭
- c. No one-to-one English-to-Chinese translation. The meanings of Chinese CV's are quite transparent from their verbal meanings, while English prepositions are quite abstruse (for non-natives).

not: 在美国我们不跟筷子吃饭 but: 在美国我们不用筷子吃饭
(跟 should be replaced with 用. The English equivalent "with" is misleading.)

2. Given that the CV-O always precedes the main verb (CV-O VP), a CV-O cannot be used directly to modify a noun (unlike the Prep-obj. in English, which can be used as a noun modifier). In Chinese, the full "CV-O VP" phrase may be used to modify a noun (i.e. CV-O VP 的 N). It helps to remember that the ipso facto definition of CV is that it co-occurs with the main verb.

the students from America not: 从美国的学生... but: 从美国来的学生
the friends who are with you not: 跟你的那些朋友...
but: 跟你一起的那些朋友 or 跟你来的那些朋友

Remember, the modifying phrase must precede the noun being modified.

the characters written with a writing brush
not: 那些字用毛笔写的 but: 用毛笔写的那些字真好看

the teacher subbing for Wang Laoshi
not: 那位老师替王老师上课的 but: 替王老师上课的那位老师教得怎么样？

textbooks prepared at this center
not: 教科书在本中心编的 but: 你喜欢在本中心编的教科书吗？

3. Aside from the most common CV's discussed above, there are the following CV's which are a bit more formal. These tend to occur more in writing or in formal speeches than in everyday spoken Chinese:

由 (from, by): 由北京至上海；由自己决定
为 (for, for sake of): 为人民服务；为这件事着急
向 (toward, in the direction of, to): 向前（钱）看；向领导报告事情的经过
朝 cháo (in the direction of): 他朝那个方向去了。
凭 píng (on the basis of): 凭什么认为这幅画是假的呢？
按 àn (according to): 按你的意见做吧！
与 yǔ (with): 与他有什么关系？与众不同
以 (by means of): 以身作则；以美国为首；以不变应万变
于 yú (to, at, in, synonym of 在, *occurs mostly as PV*): 于自己不利
于人有损；于心不忍
将 jiāng (synonym of 把, dominant in the south): 将革命干到底
将心换心 (win hearts with one's sincerity)
就 (on the question/issue of): 就此问题进行自我批评
(conduct self-criticism on this issue)

4. PV's vs. CV's: of the CV's introduced in 1.b (the most common ones), the following can also occur as PV's: 在、到、往、给

The PV may be preceded by a V or a V-O, so the pattern is:

Subj. V(O) PV-O

See if you can tell the difference between the CV usage vs. the PV usage:

在：在桌上写日记 / 写在日记里

到：到上海去看朋友 / 已经走到家了。

往：往东走一公里，就到了。 / 这种鸟每年秋天都飞往南方。(cf. XII.B.4)

给：给朋友写一封信 / 写一封信给朋友

给她买一件新衣服 / 买一件新衣服给他 / 买给他一件新衣服

Among the less common CV's (introduced in 3), the following can also function as PV's:
向、以、于。

向 (used only in the *concrete* sense of "toward a direction or destination, and preceded by V, not V-O):

飞向南方 奔向自由

not: 开车向天津 but: 开向天津 or 向天津开(车)

not: 报告向领导 but: 向领导报告

以 (very literary) ("with," in order to, thereby; *contrast meaning with CV 以*):

赠以鲜花；去信以告之

于 (very literary, occurs with literary Chinese word order, "all-purpose" PV in literary Chinese):

生于上海 求助于人 国贸位于市中心 有利于发展经济 热衷于足球
毕业于清华大学 多于五十 大理石出于云南 己不欲者，勿施于人

Pitfall: Unlike prepositions in English (where each preposition has specific meaning or meanings), the difference in meaning between the CV and PV usage is not in the words themselves, but in their position. Sometimes the difference in meaning is only one of nuance; other times, the difference is more significant. Memorizing the CV and PV meanings of the same word by hard and fast rules is difficult, and hard to apply in normal-paced conversation. One simply needs to develop automatic reflexes - called 语感 "a feel for the language."

5. The CV 把 : Subj. 把-O V (with complement of some sort)

This is one of the most basic sentence patterns in Chinese and therefore it is introduced in most beginning Chinese language textbooks. But most students do not master the active usage of this pattern until somewhat beyond the first year of study. Even more so than most grammatical points in Chinese, this one deserves "recycling" in the intermediate and even advanced level of study.

The function of this pattern is to focus on the object. The issue is **not** *who did what*, but (given a certain thing), *what did so-and-so do to it*. The focus is on the object, and using the 把 pattern is one way to prepose the object (i.e. take it to front of the verb to give it more prominence). The same function (focusing on the object) is served in English by intonation.

Three "cardinal rules" to remember about the 把 pattern are:

- The verb is a "functive" verb, and often "affective" in the sense that the action affects the object in some way.
- There is a complement to the verb, and this complement may be something rather complex (e.g. a PV-O phrase) or something as simple as the particle 了, a resultative verb

ending, or a reduplication of the verb. Without a complement, the sentence would end too abruptly.

- c. The object of 把 must be something specific, though the specificity may be implicit rather than explicit.

This rule is derived from the idea that 把 literally means "to take up (something)."

wrong: 我一定要把这些生词学。(verb lacks complement)

✓我一定要把这些生词学会。

wrong: 妈妈, 请再把一个故事讲给我听。(object of 把 is not specific)

✓妈妈, 请再给我讲一个故事。or 妈妈, 请再讲一个故事给我听。(non-specific obj.)

✓妈妈, 请再把你和爸爸结婚的故事讲给我听。(specific object)

wrong: 她每五年把一辆新汽车买。

(verb lacks complement and the object of 把 is not specific)

✓她每五年买一辆新汽车。(non-specific obj.)

✓她预备有了钱就把那辆她心爱的汽车买来。(specific object)

wrong: 我希望能把这位老师认识, 也许他能给我一些帮助。(verb is not a FV)

✓我希望能认识这位老师, 也许他能给我一些帮助。

wrong: 我把这些事情知道得很清楚。(verb is not a FV)

✓这些事情, 我知道得很清楚。

Note on the last two pairs of sentences: 认识 and 知道 are not affective verbs. They seem to be "functionive" verbs, but one might argue that they are verbs of *cognition* rather than *function*, and that's why they may not be used with the 把 construction. However, the next two examples are perfectly acceptable. The key test question is: If the verb phrase is translated as "take/take up...and do...to it," does the resultant sentence make sense?

你应当把这个问题好好地想一想。

我把他们的建议都考虑过了, 可是还是觉得我自己的作法最好。

别把事情忘了。

(as pertains to rule c above, 事情 means 那件事情, so it is implicitly specific.)

Some interesting example sentences for advanced students:

平常我们看电影只把它当作娱乐, 但是上这门电影课就要把每部电影从头到尾研究一番。

如果候选人把自己的政见说得很清楚, 老百姓就能看出它的毛病了。

我们必需在两天之内把这个问题解决, 要不然就没救了。

The last example sentence is exceptional in that the verb 解决 does not have a complement. This kind of exception would never be possible with single-syllable verbs. Even with bisyllabic verbs, it is rare, e.g.:

wrong: 我们要把这个问题研究。

(the 把 pattern must have a complement after the verb 研究)

✓我们要把这个问题研究一下。 ✓我们要把这个问题研究清楚。

Pitfall: Aside from misusing 把 when one or more of the three conditions are not met, another big pitfall is not using it when it is appropriate to use it (due to lack of that 把 mental groove). So, remember, when you want to focus on the object, use the 把 pattern.

There is one other way to focus on the object - by preposing it as the topic of the sentence.

你写给我的信我都留下来了。

我把你写给我的信都留下来了。

*我留下来了（所有）你写给我的信。(OK, but wimpy!)

请你把那张桌子搬到客厅里。

那张桌子，请你（把它）搬到客厅里。

*请你搬那张桌子到客厅里。(OK, but wimpy!)

我们把(所有的)菜都吃完了。

所有的菜，我们都吃完了。

*我们吃完了所有的菜。(OK, but wimpy!)

6. The "被 pattern" is a mirror image of the 把 pattern. It focuses on the *perpetrator of the action* and the *perpetrated act*, whereas the 把 pattern focuses on the object of the action. The basic pattern is:

Subj. 被 (+agent/perpetrator) VP ("subject" is the "receptor" of the action)

被 in this pattern may be replaced by its more colloquial alternates 叫 and 让. 被、叫、和 让 are all CV's that mark the agent of an action in a passive sentence. But 被 differs from 叫 and 让 in the following respects:

- 被 has only this coverbial function whereas 叫 and 让 have other functions (discussed later in this section).
- 被 is a little more formal than 叫 and 让, so it is used in written form (as well as in speech) whereas 叫 and 让 generally occur only in speech.
- In a passive sentence in which 叫 or 让 is used to introduce the agent of action, an optional 给 may be added immediately before the main verb, imparting a little more colloquial flavor to the sentence.
- With the CV 被, the agent can be understood and omitted, leaving the CV 被 "dangling" without an object. With 叫 and 让, the agent cannot be omitted.

他们多生孩子这件事被(政府)发现了，结果被罚款了。(d)

那个卖毒品的人被(警察)抓去了。后来他被送到戒毒院去了。(d)

母亲的时间都被几个孩子占去了，她完全没有自己的生活。

母亲的时间都叫几个孩子(给)占去了，她完全没有自己的生活。(c)

他太倒霉了！新买的汽车第一天就让一辆货车给撞坏了。【倒霉：have bad luck】(c)
(for advanced students) 候选人都被工、商界买通了，所以选举并不等于民主。

While the 被 pattern is most often used with unfortunate or undesirable events, it can also occur with positive events.

那个年轻的女子被(市民)选上市长了。(agent 市民 is likely to be omitted)
他们的家务都让婆婆给弄得有条有理，夫妻俩白天可以完全放心地去工作。

In addition to marking the agent in passive sentences, 叫 and 让 can also mean "allow, let, have (someone do something), cause (someone to...)." In this function, they are "causative verbs," and their objects are the subjects of the embedded sentences. The pattern is:

Subj. 让/叫/使 Subj - predicate
(embedded sentence)

我小时候，我妈不让我一个人坐地铁。
我的老师一定要让我参加比赛，其实我对比赛完全不感兴趣。
有那么多人让我参加比赛，而我实在很害怕比赛，这叫我怎么办呢？
我离开家之前，母亲叫我每星期给她写一封信。
别让学生在课上看书，当然更不能让他们说英语。

叫 is also used in its primary meaning of "to call, to be called, to order up (a dish)."

他的名字是王建国，可是因为长得又高又大，大家都叫他高大汉。
我们是老朋友了，叫我王先生挺别扭的，叫我老王就好了。【别扭：awkward】
我们各人叫一个菜，在加一个汤，怎么样？

7. 被 and 由 contrasted: 被 indicates *who did it*, 由 indicates *who has (or took) the authority or responsibility* for doing something.

语法课是由凌老师来讲课的。
but not 语法课是被凌老师来讲课的。

他的婚事不是自己决定的，是由父母决定的。
but not ……，是被父母决定的。

放在窗台上的那些书被雨水淋湿了。
but not 放在窗台上的那些书由雨水淋湿了。

被 occurs most often with completed action (though it *can be* an on-going or a hypothetical state, e.g. 我常被老师批评。/ 如果不准备功课，会被老师批评。). 由 can occur with completed action, a general situation, or a contemplated situation, most often it occurs with the latter two. This is simply a logical outcome of the meaning of 被 and 由 (i.e., not so much the result of a grammar rule).

Pitfall: Because students tend to develop the 被 mental groove well before the 由 mental groove, there is a tendency to use 被 indiscriminately in translating the English word "by," even where it is more appropriate to use 由。

*那本书被李教授写了。(Not a good sentence, unless it means: 糟糕！本来我想写那本书的，可被李教授先写了。)

✓那本书是（由）李教授写的。

wrong: 美国的总统是被人民选出来的。

✓美国的总统是由人民选出来的。

8. There are two other CV's - 比 and 离 - which are structurally the same as the CV's covered in this lesson. Because they are very important and their usage quite special, they will be relegated to a separate lesson (Lesson XIII).

In addition to CV's, there are some two-syllable conjunctions - e.g. 对于、关于、由于、至于 - that serve the function of introducing a circumstance that co-occurs with the main verb. All these conjunctions may be used at the head of clauses, and some of them may be used after the subject. They will be discussed in Lesson XV.