

XV. CONJUNCTIONS, LINKING ADVERBS, AND SET PHRASES (成语)

Chinese grammar beyond the basic level becomes the study of a special kind of vocabulary, which can be called "semanto-syntactic words" (结构词 jiégòucí). So it is no longer the study of grammar per se. If we compare the Chinese language with Tinkertoys, the "substantive" vocabulary are the round pieces, and the 结构词 are the stick pieces. Both kinds of pieces are essential for creating a Tinkertoy form. The most commonly used 结构词 have already been covered in first and second year courses. As one moves into the post-basic level, especially in the reading of expository prose (where sentences become longer), the more sophisticated 结构词 are introduced. But the number of 结构词 is finite, and their meanings and usages are readily found in dictionaries.

结构词 are conjunctions, pivotal words, and phrases that set the stage or background. They sometimes operate singly, but more often they operate in tandem - in "discontinuous frames." The different types of 结构词 are sometimes called 连接词语、副词、常用词、or simply 句构. The term 结构词, literally "structure words," is just about as colorless as one can find, but it does have the virtue of being generic enough to catch all of the different types. In Chinese, they are sometimes called 虚词 "empty words." But these words are neither totally nor equally "empty"; they actually differ in degree of "emptiness," some of them in fact have quite a bit of substantive meaning. In fact, it would be a gross mistake to think of the 虚词's as unimportant, for their functional meaning is crucial to framing the relationship among the inter-related "substantive" parts of a linguistic unit.

To be sure, there are 结构词 in English as well, but they are not nearly as abundant and diverse as in Chinese. A distinguishing characteristic of many Chinese 结构词 is that they operate in two's and three's, such as "不要说……就是……也……" (not to mention..., even...is...). Such "discontinuous frames" are rare in English, therefore one must "think in Chinese" in order to have them flow out naturally.

The mastery of 结构词 is in some ways easier than the mastery of basic grammar, because there is little interference from the student's native language. But the student does need to acquire a "feel" (语感) for this category of vocabulary because most of them don't have ready-made mental grooves in the student's mind. There is always a gap between what the student knows passively and what he can use actively. This phenomenon is even more true of 结构词 than ordinary vocabulary. When we express ourselves in a foreign language, we naturally think of the substantive elements first. Inserting the 结构词 and using them appropriately takes extra effort, because the "linguistic grooves" for the 结构词 need to be "worn in" through practice.

Use of a sophisticated vocabulary consisting of "substantive" words is one characteristic that marks the speech or writing of a well-educated Chinese; the other is the use of 结构词. Now a complaint against the use of sophisticated "substantive" vocabulary and 结构词 in classroom discussion that one sometimes hears from students and even some teachers is that it is artificial, that their Chinese friends and people on the street don't talk that way. But then how many native English-speaking friends of yours and people on the streets of America do you hear speaking like graduate students at seminars, scholars at professional conferences, trade negotiators, and lawyers in court? Moreover, if one wants to learn to write decent Chinese prose, an efficient way to go about it is to practice composing short passages

mentally (without writing it out) and expressing them orally.

1. 结构词 that operate singly operate like movable adverbs for the most part. Of the two positions where they may occur - at the very beginning of the sentence and after the subject - the former is preferred. Here are some of the most commonly used single 结构词 (this list is by no means exhaustive):

a) 对于 (toward, vis-a-vis) : 对于运动比赛的电视节目, 很多人都相当感兴趣。

关于 (concerning) : 关于如何帮助贫民, 美国政府提出了一个计划。

美国政府提出了一个关于如何帮助贫民的计划。

至于 (as for) : 至于自己在业余的时间运动, 参加的人就不那么多了。

由于 (due to) : 由于进口货的价格比较便宜, 本国的工业很难发展起来。

由于她父亲的影响, 她到现在还是认为女人应该依靠男人。

【依靠 : rely on】

b) 到底 (after all) : 台湾的「国语」和大陆的「普通话」到底有什么不同 ?

到底台湾的「国语」和大陆的「普通话」有什么不同 ?

到底是先有鸡还是先有鸡蛋, 谁都不知道。

c) 难道 (incredulous) (one of the more difficult ones to master):

三年没见面了, 难道你把我忘了! ? or 三年没见面了, 你难道把我忘了! ?

难道男运动员没有女运动员强? !

难道佛教、针灸、这些传统的中国文化在西方比在中国更受尊重了? !

【针灸 : acupuncture ; 受尊重 : to be respected】

难免/不免 (unavoidable, inevitable) (distinguish from 难道; synonymous with 免不了) :

这是他第一次出国, 难免会想家。

夫妻之间难免有时候会吵架的。

难怪 (no wonder, synonymous with 怪不得) :

原来他父母都是音乐家, 难怪她是个音乐天才。

他们结了婚以后, 一直跟丈夫的父母住在一起, 难怪到现在还没生孩子。

d) 除非 (unless) :

在中国一个老人是不会单独住的, 除非他连一个家人都没有。【单独 : alone】

除非你把你的「重男轻女」的态度改掉, 我是不会嫁给你的。

Note: the "除非……" clause can be either the first or second clause.

Often coupled with 要不然 : 除非你非常热爱音乐, (要不然)当个音乐家是很苦的。

除非他在路上发生了问题, (要不然)今天晚上应该到得了。

e) 而已 (merely) (exceptional in its position at the end of a sentence) :

五十年前, 中国有五亿人口而已。

我们不应该把「妇女能顶半边天」当作一个口号而已。【口号 : slogan】

Often used in tandem with 只是、不过是、就是 :

那时候我不是真的想吸毒, 只是想试试而已。

从前妇女在外头工作不过是给家里带来多一点收入而已, 并不是认真地发展自己

的事业。【收入：income；认真地：earnestly, seriously】

2. 结构词 that operate in tandem:

a) (如果/要是)……(的话) (if...)

你不能来的话，请早点儿告诉我。

如果你必须提早离开的话，我们可以提前给你考试。

Oddly, this commonly used pattern is rarely covered in basic Chinese language textbooks. In colloquial speech, "……的话" is often used, with or without the 如果/要是 part. In contrast, it is not used in written form.

b) 连……都/也…… (连 is a coverb) (even...)

他刚到北京的时候，连一句汉语都不会说。

他们的臭豆腐做得好极了，连老外都喜欢吃。【臭豆腐：stinky (fermented) tofu】

这个老外什么中国菜都吃得来，连臭豆腐他都喜欢。or 他连臭豆腐都喜欢。

but not: 他都喜欢连臭豆腐 nor 他都连臭豆腐喜欢

自从他染上了毒瘾，每个月连三千块都不够他用。

【染上毒瘾：to be hooked on drugs】

Note that the object of the coverb 连 may be *notionally* either the subject (second example) or object (third example) of the sentence. But in both cases, the coverbial phrase 连-object always precedes the adverb 都/也, which precedes the main verb.

c) 就是……也…… (even if..., ...; even if it's..., ...)

你就是不同意我的看法，也应该听完我要说的话。

but not: 连你不同意我的看法，也应该听完我要说的话。

连最有经验的老师也有时候听不懂学生的问题。

就是最有经验的老师也有时候听不懂学生的问题。(not as common as the preceding)

(就是 in the above sentence is actually 就是+是, with the two 是's merged into one)

就是来到了中国，也得努力学习才能学好汉语。

but not: 连来到了中国，也得努力学习才能学好汉语。

就是我有时间也不去看那个电影。

but not: 连我有时间也不去看那个电影。

Common pitfall: Notionally, the "连……都/也……" and "就是……也……" patterns above are similar, but 连 is a coverb meaning "even" and 就是 is a conjunction meaning "even if." The object of the coverb 连 must be a noun phrase of some sort (including nominalized verbs). 就是 introduces a subordinate clause in a two-clause sentence. Sometimes, native English speakers even get "even though" (虽然) mixed up with "even" (连) and "even if" (就是). Like most pitfalls, this one can be averted by "thinking in Chinese."

"即使…也…" is a synonymous - but slightly more formal - version of "就是…也…":

即使你不告诉她，她也会知道的。

即使没有政府的帮助，南方沿海的经济也会发展得很快。【沿海：coastal】

d) 不但…也/还… (not only...also...)

不但…而且… (not only...moreover...)(these two patterns are synonymous)

我们之间不但有代沟，还有文化的差距。【代沟：generation gap；差距：discrepancy】

这个学生不但能说一口流利的汉语，而且能写一手漂亮的毛笔字。

(不但)…，反而… (not only...on the contrary...)

自从他有了家教以来，功课不但没进步，反而（还）退步了。【家教：tutor】

我跟她道歉以后，她不但没有原谅我，反而决定要跟我分手了。

【道歉：apologize；原谅：forgive】

e) 一…就… (as soon as...):

我一看你的样子，就能猜出你的家庭背景。

我母亲一大学毕业就结婚了，所以一点工作的经验都没有。

f) 一…才… (as soon as...only then...):

我从前学过法语和德语，可是一学中文才知道法语、德语不能算是真正的「外语」。

她一带着新买的 Rolex 表游泳才知道她买的是仿冒品！

【游泳：swim；仿冒品：counterfeit】

g) 虽然…，可是/但是… (although...but...):

我虽然不太了解你，但是能猜出你童年的一些经历。

h) (除了)…(以外)，…(还)… (aside from..., ...)

他每个周末除了喝啤酒和跳舞以外，什么都不做。

他们除了自己生的八个孩子以外，还领养了两个。【领养：to adopt】

i) 好像…，可是/其实… (seems to be..., but/actually...)

他好像很能独立思考，其实他很容易受别人的影响。

【独立思考：to think independently】

别以为…，其实… (don't be mistaken that..., actually...)

你别以为培养孩子没意思，其实它是人生中最有意义的事。

【培养：to nurture；有意义：meaningful】

j) 好像…似的 (seems to be...)

当一个家庭主妇好像很容易(似的)，其实不然。【不然：not so】

k) 先…再… (first...then...)

我看你们最好先大学毕业再考虑结婚。【考虑：to consider】

l) ……是/倒是……，可是/不过…… (granted..., but...)

SV 是/倒是 SV， 可是… (granted..., but...)

The second pattern above is simply a particular version of the first one. Both patterns make a concession in the first clause, but return with a counter argument in the second clause. There is a slight difference in nuance between 是 and 倒是 in the first clause. 倒是 implies that the speaker is conceding to a fact that runs counter to either his previous view or a commonly accepted view.

水果是有营养，可是人不能光靠它来维持生命啊！【维持生命：maintain life】
金钱重要是重要，不过生活品质还是最重要的吧？【生活品质：quality of life】
儒家思想是中国文化很重要的一部分，可是现代人已经不重视它了。

【儒家思想：Confucianism】

教授说得有道理是有道理，可是已经无法说服那个学生了。【说服：convince】
听您这么说，我觉得儒家思想倒是真的很有价值，不过大概没办法说服年轻人了。
【价值：value】

m) A 的 A, B 的 B, ... (there are those who..., then there are those who...)

在电影院里，大笑的大笑，大哭的大哭，打呼的打呼，实在太吵了。我宁愿在家看录像带。

现在的大学生啊，酗酒的酗酒，吸毒的吸毒，和前一代不一样了！

【酗酒：indulge in alcoholism】

大学毕业以后，同学们出国的出国，工作的工作，真不知道什么时候再有机会在一起了。

n) (要)不是...，就是... (it's one or the other; if it's not..., then it's...)

刚到中国的学生难免会生病，(要)不是感冒，就是拉肚子。

从她的口音我能听出她不是美国人。她(要)不是英国人，就是澳大利亚人。

o) 要不是... (就) ... (if it weren't for..., ...)(distinguish from "要不是...，就是..." above)
幸亏...要不然... (fortunately..., otherwise...)

These two patterns are similar in that they convey a turn in the outcome of an event due to an intervention. The difference between the two is that the first pattern may be used with a positive or a negative outcome, whereas the second pattern is used only with a positive outcome (i.e. the intervention averted a negative outcome, and saved the situation from unfolding into a major or minor disaster).

要不是张教授给了我一些指点，我很可能(就)已经停学了。【停学：quit school】

幸亏我去请教了张教授，要不然我很可能已经停学了。

要不是那个朋友替他找到了一份零工，他也许(就)没法子生活了。

【零工：odd job】

幸亏那个朋友替他找到了一份零工，要不然他也许没法子生活了。

要不是最近生意不好，老板一定会给我们加薪的。(actual outcome is negative)

but not: 幸亏最近生意不好，要不然老板一定会给我们加薪的。

p) 别说...，就是...也... (not to mention..., even...is...)

有了三个孩子以后，别说去旅游了，就是在家安安静静地看一下书也不行。

(note: ordering of the latter two phrases is the reverse from English)

- q) 只有…才（不）… (only by...can...) (necessary condition for a certain outcome)

只有学过两年中文才可以申请来 IUP 学习。【申请：to apply】

只有以爱情为基础，婚姻才会成功。

你回国以后，只有经常用中文和中国朋友交谈，你的中文才不会退步。

- 只好…… (have no choice but...)

考大学的那天我病了，所以没考上，我只好明年再考一次。

学校的经费不够，今年只好不加薪了。【经费：funds】

- r) 从来不… (never do something) 从来没…过 (have never done something)

我管教孩子的方法是「有话好好说」，所以从来不打他们。【管教：to discipline】

我的孩子从来没被我打过，但是他们都非常听话。

他从来没吸过毒，连烟都没抽过。

- s) …也好，…也好，…（反正）（都）… (no matter...or..., in any case...)

这孩子真固执，你骂他也好，打他也好，对他都没有影响。【固执：stubborn】

老板给我加薪也好，减轻我的工作也好，反正我已经决定离开这个公司了。

【减轻：to lighten】

3. Set phrases -- the majority of which are four-character phrases -- constitute a very rich part of the Chinese language. The speech of all well-educated native Chinese is spiced with a goodly dose of them. So this is another hallmark of a near-native speaker of Chinese. Set phrases can be subdivided into 俗语 (proverbs), 成语 (set phrases), and 习用语 (customary sayings or idioms). It is difficult to clearly distinguish among these types, and even native Chinese do not agree on the definition of each. From the point of view of a student of the Chinese language, it suffices to know that it is important to master the commonly used four-character phrases, for they are pithy sayings that are semantically fully-packed, expressive, eloquent, and powerful. Phonetically, the four-syllable rhythm also adds "punch" and imparts a nice "ring," so that even names of Chinese dishes tend to be in four-character phrases. You have no doubt already encountered many four-character phrases in basic Chinese and in whatever textbook you are studying currently. When studying the vocabulary list in each lesson, pay special attention to these phrases. When you have finished studying a book, review the vocabulary in the *Vocabulary Index*, and again pay special attention to these four-character phrases.

To make it easier for you to comprehend and remember set phrases, take note of the following characteristics. Getting a grasp on the first three characteristics, coupled with knowledge of classical Chinese, allows one to make intelligent guesses about a lot of set phrases, or at least makes it much easier to remember them.

- a) Literary words are often used in lieu of their modern vernacular counterparts, e.g. 无 for 没, 日 for 天, 身 for 自己, etc. Since set phrases are widely used in the modern vernacular, knowing some classical Chinese is very useful for mastering this aspect of modern Chinese.

日新月异

以身作则

身不由己

无家可归

心不在焉

- b) Constituent words tend to be used in their classical meanings, so a familiar word may

actually be used in an unfamiliar way.

不 <u>了</u> 之	不 <u>进</u> 则退	其 <u>乐</u> 无 <u>穷</u>
信口开河	逆水 <u>行</u> 舟	听天 <u>由</u> 命

- c) Grammatically, four-character phrases can often be parsed into 2-2, with parallelisms in the structure, e.g. V-O V-O, subj-predicate subj-predicate, adv-V adv-V.

东张西望	人山人海	忘恩负义	妻离子散	倾家荡产
心灰意冷	胡说八道	四通八达	举一反三	七嘴八舌

- d) Many 成语's have historical allusions, and each has a story behind it. They are comparable to "Achilles' heel" or "Trojan horse" in English. It is well-nigh impossible to guess at their meanings; one simply must know the stories behind them. But these also tend to be the most fun to learn, and are most unforgettable. Here are some of the most common ones:

塞翁失马	愚公移山	朝秦暮楚	四面楚歌
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