

DEC project 2: Chinese Tough Time

Group Number: 06

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Notes:

1. 2-5 pages, 12 font size, 1.5 spacing
2. Deadline: 5 pm, 30 Nov 2016 (Week 14)
3. Weighting: 25%
4. Work in groups to conduct an interview with a Cantonese-speaking or international student who has learned or is learning Chinese to find out what is the most challenging and difficult part in Chinese grammar.
5. Make sure you cite all the references / websites you've used.

(1) The Tough Question(s)

Q1. The use of 「回」

Reason behind:

Imagine one is withdrawing cash from a ATM, and the friend beside him or her says: "Hey, remember to take the card." If the utterance in English is converted into Chinese, the sentence will probably be: 「喂, 記得拿回提款卡啊。」 Noticeably, 「回」 is inserted after the main verb in the concerned translation.

Foreign Chinese learners may find that VP+ 「回」 confusing, for there is no such construction in English. What are the applications of 「回」 then?

Q2. The appropriate use of conjunctions 「和」、「跟」、「與」

Reason behind:

It is because all the conjunctions above can be translated into ‘and’ with only minor differences in their semantic meanings. Accordingly, Chinese learners often have some troubles to confirm which one is the optimum that they can use in a certain sentence.

Q3. The applications of 「差點沒」

(A1) 我差點吃飯——沒吃 versus (A2) 我差點沒吃飯——吃了

(B1) 我差點回家了——沒回家 versus (B2) 我差點沒回家——沒回/回了

(C1) 我差點摔一跤——沒摔 versus (C2) 我差點沒摔一跤——沒摔

From the examples above (Cheng, 2007), it is seen that the two sentences in group A own opposite meanings, while both sentences in group C have negative meanings. Last, in sentence (B2), two different understandings may emerge. In most cases, “cha dian” (差點) is used to express a negative meaning and can be substituted by “mei” (沒).

e.g. 我沒吃飯／我沒回家／我沒摔一跤

With reference to the possible replacement, the majority of Chinese language learners, may find the semantic meaning of the construction “cha dian mei” (差點沒) + VP most confusing. Why can the components of 「差點」 and 「沒」 come together? What are the applications of the constructions 「差點沒」 + VP ?

(2) Potential Answer(s) to the Proposed Question(s):

Q1. 「回」為動量詞。(敏, 2005)

In light of 《說文解字》(回, 轉也。) and 《漢語大字典》「回」originally functioned diversely in Chinese written texts:

(1) 「回繞」：倬彼雲漢，昭回於天。《詩·大漢·雲經》

(2) 「掉轉」：君王掩面救不得，回看血淚相和流。《長恨歌》

(3) 「改變」：夫移風易俗，使天下回心而鄉道...《漢書·賈誼傳》

- (4)「違背」：徐方不回，王曰還歸。《詩·大雅·常武》
- (5)「迷惑」：眾邪合黨，以回人君。《新語·輔政》
- (6)「偏向」：且秦、楚匹也，若之何其回於富也。《國語·晉語八》
- (7)「奸邪」：乃回乃邪，實為讒慝。《司隸校尉箴》
- (8)「返回」：春回大地
- (9)「退回」：有家眷的人，一提到太太、小孩，小姐就把他回了。《壓迫》
- (10)「回報」：日後他來通消息時，好言回他。《二刻拍案驚奇》
- (11)「避開」：風塵中人，知他真不在家，還是故意回你？《紅梨記·詩要》
- (12)「轉買」：果然用了二十八兩銀子，問鄉宦家回了一頂全副大橋來。《醒世姻緣傳》
- (13)「昏眩」：於是事物變化，目眩耳回。《文選·揚雄〈甘泉賦〉》
- (14) 量詞 -
- (14.1) 相當於「次」：先生杖履無事，一日走千回。《水調歌頭·盟鷗》
- (14.2) 相當於「件」：然而這到底是無可挽救的，所以一向不大注意這回事。《且介亭雜文二集·從“別”字說開去》
- (14.3) 相當於「一會兒」：荷生想了一回，說道：「坐橋甚好。」《花月痕》
- (14.4) 用於小說等，相當於「章」：《三國演義》第三回
- (15) 少數民族之名稱
- (16)「迴」之簡化字
- (17) 姓氏

Nevertheless, as time has passed by, 「回」 only passes on seven meanings now:

- (1)「走回原來的地方」：回家
- (2)「掉轉」：回顧
- (3)「曲折」或「環繞」：回廊
- (4)「答覆」：回信
- (5) 量詞 -
- (5.1) 事件說的次數：兩回事
- (5.2) 章回小的一章：且聽下回分解

(6) 少數民族之名稱

(7) 姓氏

Apart from the explanations in the written texts, 「返」 is roughly a substitute of 「回」 in the dialect named Cantonese. The substitute has the meaning of 「返回」.(孔, 2014) As a consequence, Cantonese native speakers may utter: 「拎返...」, which exactly equals to 「拿回...」, the written form in Chinese.

Q2. Here are some Chinese sentences which involve various conjunctions:

- (1) 這個週末, 我和小明見了一面。
- (2) 這個週末, 我跟小明見了一面。
- (3) 這個週末, 我與小明見了一面。

It is to be seen that from the above model sentences, each conjunction represents the fundamental meaning of “and”. Also, they all link up two or more nouns or NPs as coordinative conjunctions. Other than these, the three lexicons are prepositions.

Now move to the following sentences:

- (1) 魚眼和珍珠是不同的。
- (2) 小明常常跟小麗在一起。
- (3) 天與地, 是與非。

We select 「和」 to connect “fish eye” and “pearl” because it is usually adopted to connect two different items which have no correlative meaning, such as two irrelative arguments “英語” and “漢語” in the title of a Chinese academic essay 「英語和漢語的區別」. In addition, it can use in both formal and casual events. Therefore, the usage of “和” is much more frequent than the other two conjunctions.

「跟」 is used to connect hominine words in speeches. For example, 「我跟你走。」; 「我跟他在一起工作。」. We cannot say 「英語跟漢語的區別」, as the statement sounds strange and it is not suitable for academic usage. We tend to use “跟” in casual events, such as a conversation with a counterpart. As a result, 「跟」 tends to be the most informal one when comparing with the other two.

「與」 always used to link up different items which have contrastive meanings, e.g: 「美女與野獸」 instead of 「美女和野獸」. In addition, it is mostly adopted in a formal way. For instance, 「漢語和英語的區別」 versus 「漢語與英語的區別」, both are acceptable in Chinese.

Yet, the distinction is not easy to make, especially for comitative prepositions which convey the meaning of “with” or “accompanied by”. Consider the following cases:

- (1) 我和他經常在一起。
- (2) 你跟他是朋友。

In (1) “he” (和) has to be considered as a preposition, while in (2) “gen” (跟) can be interpreted as a conjunction or as a preposition.

As to solve the confusion, Zhu (1982:176) suggested two criteria for distinguishing the conjunctions from the prepositions:

- (1) If “he” (和) (“gen” (跟), “tong” (同)) connects elements that are permutable, i.e. have equal statuses, then it can be dealing with a conjunction and not a preposition;
- (2) if “he” (和) (“gen” (跟), “tong” (同)) can be preceded by any modifying adverbial, it is a preposition.

Tao (1991) also pointed out the same distinctions between conjunctions and prepositions had to be made in Ancient Chinese for words like “ji” (及) or “yu” (與). He added the third rule: “comitative prepositions are wielded when NP1 displays higher topicality

and/or empathy than NP2. In other words, for the sentences with comitative prepositions, there are differences in the discursive roles between the first NPs and second NPs, unlike those with conjunctions.

Q3. Regarding the “cha dian mei” (差點沒) + VP construction, some scholars have studied it and put forward a number of relative hypotheses. Expect theory (Zhu, 1959) indicates that there are two basic rules for the usage of “cha dian mei” (差點沒).

(1) If the speaker hopes something can be realized, then a positive sentence will be uttered to express a negative meaning. On the contrary, a negative sentence will be utilized to express a positive meaning.

e.g. 差點買到 (=沒買到), 差點沒買到 (買到)

(2) If the speaker does not want something to become realized, then both cases convey negative meanings.

e.g. 差點弄丟了 (沒丟), 差點沒弄丟 (沒丟)

Zhu also listed out some sample sentences that apply the “cha dian mei” (差點沒) + result construction.

e.g. A. 差點沒及格; B. 差點沒買到了; C. 差點沒輸了。

In sentence A, it is sure that the speaker hopes 「及格」 can be realized, so sentence A expresses the positive meaning that 「及格」 is the final result. In sentence B, 「買到」 is again presented with a positive meaning because the speaker hopes he or she can successfully buy what he or she wants. Yet, in sentence C, 「輸了」 is not what the speaker hopes to witness, thus, “cha dian mei” (差點沒) construction is adopted to point out the fact that he or she did not lose.

However, Expect Theory cannot be applied to all cases. Ambiguity still exists when the speaker's attitude is neutral. For example, two teams are playing basketball, both sides hope to put the ball into the opponent's basket. In this case, if a player says “cha dian mei

tou jin qu” (差點沒投進去), the utterance has two distinctive meanings for the teams: 「投進得分」 for the attacking team; 「差一點兒, 沒投進去」 for the defending team.

Additionally, the “cha dian mei” (差點沒) + result construction does not appear alone in the process of language learning. In most cases, learners can understand the appropriate semantic meanings of “cha dian mei” (差點沒) construction according to the context offered.

There is another theory which is similar to Expect Theory, which is named Positive Element Theory (Shi, 1993), in which divides entities into two categories: positive and negative. Yet, as same as Expect Theory, Positive Element Theory has a deficit as well, that is the natures of things may be combined sometimes, they may not be purely positive or negative, and thus hard to be originated.

Meanwhile, other scholars have put forward some analyses, for instance, in pragmatics, “cha dian mei” (差點沒) present rejoice in the case that something bad has been escaped by sheer luck (Zhang, 2004); while in phonetics, “cha dian mei” (差點沒) can be divided into “cha dian (差點)/ mei (沒)” or “cha dian mei/ (差點沒)”, in which the same phrase is associated with a dissimilar pause and meaning at the same time: the preceding one means 「差點 (兒), 某人最後沒有做到某件事/某件事沒有發生」 while the latter one conveys the meaning of 「某人差點沒有做到某件事, 但最後還是做了/某件事幾乎沒有發生, 但最後還是發生了」. (董, 2001)

(3) What have we discovered?

(1) With reference to Q1, meaning loss is diachronic. As there are always language changes in time, people may just cease utilizing some habitual, popular vocabulary or phrases to demonstrate certain concepts.

(2) In our opinion, though scholars view 「回」 as a 動量詞 for which 動量詞 are usually

replaced by adverbs or adverbial phrases (溫, 2013), 「回」 should more likely be a co-verb, as same as 「從」, for it has already weakened and is incapable of acting as main verbs sometimes (Eifring, 1995), as in the example we have brought up in Q1.

(3) Similar conjunctions may make up of dissimilar semantic meanings when they are attached in particular contexts. It is more restricted when it comes to conjunctions in Chinese. However, in English, the conjunction can conjoin any type of constituents, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, even clauses.

(4) Various particles can have similar syntactic functions. For instance, when they connect two objects which own equal statuses, all of them will then be identified as conjunctions or prepositions. However, if they are preceded by any modifying adverbials, they are treated as prepositions.

(5) The meaning of 「跟」 is transpositioned from the nominal meaning of “the back part of a foot” to the verbal meaning of “to follow”. Later on, 「跟」 carries a grammatical meaning of “with”. Although the transformed meaning adds some new elements, it still related to the original nominal meaning to some extent.

(6) In our opinion, though the theories which are mentioned above are useful for language teaching, they still encompass some weaknesses, like they cannot explain the exceptional cases, like the case of basketball competition. It is hard for teachers to make the special circumstances clear and comprehensible to foreign students.

(4) References

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古代「迴」和「回」有何区别？（無日期）。2016年11月29日，取自
<https://www.zhihu.com/question/22020485>

漢典：回（無日期）。2016年11月29日，取自：
<http://www.zdic.net/z/17/js/56DE.htm>