



Chinese Morphology & Syntax

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Outline

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- Morphology
- Syntax
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Introduction

- Type of language : an isolating language
with a very low morpheme per word ratio and no inflectional morphology.
- is a group of related, but in many cases not mutually intelligible, language varieties, forming the Sinitic branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family.
- Standard Chinese
a standardized form of spoken Chinese based on the Beijing dialect of Mandarin.
one of the six official languages of the United Nations.
The written form: based on the logograms known as Chinese characters.

Morphology

Key words:

- Chinese characters
- Morphem
- Compound
- Order
- Derivation
- Genderless
- Lack of plural

Morphology – Chinese characters

represent words of the language using several strategies :

- originally pictograms
which depicted the objects denoted
or ideograms, in which meaning was expressed iconically
- **The vast majority were written using the rebus principle**
in which a character for a similarly sounding word was either simply borrowed
or (more commonly) extended with a disambiguating semantic marker
to form a phono-semantic compound character
- E.g. 日, 目, 山, 人, 木, 休
- No letters, connection between form(graphy) and meaning

Morphology - Morphem

- The Chinese syllable is distinctive in that, in most cases, it constitutes a morpheme, the smallest unit of meaning. Because most syllables have meaning they are often considered to be words. Exactly what constitutes a word is a much debated matter in every language, however particularly so in the case of Chinese.
- To be sure, Chinese does have many words of one syllable, such as wo ("I"), hao ("good"), lái ("come").

Morphology - Compound

- In English : "**teacher**" as a single word made up of two morphemes: a free form **teach** and a bound form **er** ("one who does something")
- . But in Chinese the equivalent term **jiàoyuán**, though similarly made up of the free form **jiào** ("teach") and a bound form **yuán** ("one who does something"), is often described compound made up of two words.
- On the basis chiefly of such an approach, in which every syllable is defined as a word, Chinese is commonly described as monosyllabic. This approach is rejected by many scholars who consider that it has been unduly influenced by the characterbased writing system.
- A video about basic Chinese characters system.

Morphology - Order

- Is important

e.g. nai níu & níu nai
milk cattle & cattle milk
Milchkuh & Kuhmilch

e.g. mì feng & feng mì
Honig Biene & Biene Honig
Honigbiene & (Biene)honig

- But it doesn't always work ...

Morphology – Derivation

- The words maintain the same, but they can be another part of speech flexibly.
- Wo tán(v.) Jíta
I play guitar
(I play the guitar)
Tán(n.) Jíta shì wode xìngqū
Play guitar ist my hobby
(Playing the guitar is my hobby)

Morphology - Genderless

- She, he; der, die, das, le, la ... always in confusion.
- But! In Chinese there are different writings of he, she and it.

她(ta), 他(ta), 它(ta)

Only to be written and be read.

Morphology – Lack of plural

- High frequency mistakes by chinese people:
three apple
many banana
many money
- Because there is not any inflection of plural in Chinese.
- But! One exception : There is a suffix „men“, e.g. ren(person), renmen(people) ...

Syntax

Key words:

- SVO structure
- Order
- Tenseless
- Aspect
- Negation
- Classifier (count word)
- Adjunct or clause

Syntax – SVO structure

- In the ordinary case : SVO
- Sometimes OSV is also possible
- It can never be OVS
- Because there is no case (DE: Kasus like Nominativ, Akkusativ...)
- That is the reason why the word order is important.

Syntax - Order

- If the order changes, the meaning changes, too.

e.g. wo ài ni

Ich lieben du

(Ich liebe dich)

ni ài wo

Du lieben Ich

(Du liebst mich)

Syntax - Order

- It doesn't change the order of words but the tone (or adds a tone auxiliary at the end of the sentence) if the sentential form changes.

e.g. zhè shì mao.

This is cat.

(This is a cat.)

zhè shì mao (ma) ?

This is cat

(Is this a cat?)

zhè shì shénme ?

This is what

(What is this?)

Maybe you have heard by chinese people ...

- I go to school yesterday.
- He is in Germany last year.
- We tomorrow write you an email.

Syntax - Tenseless

- Chinese as a tenseless language

When it comes to tenseless languages, one candidate that often comes to mind is Chinese. For example, in Binnick's (1991) monumental work, Chinese dialects are cited as tenseless languages, in addition to Biblical Hebrew and Quranic Arabic. However, detailed arguments for Chinese as a tenseless language were first brought to the fore only recently, in Lin (2003, 2006, 2010). Although there is still a debate concerning whether Chinese should be analyzed as a tenseless language, as in Lin (2006, 2010), or a null tensed language as in Sybesma (2007), it is one of the few tenseless languages in the world that have received a detailed tenseless analysis in the literature.

Jo-Wang Lin, P671, The Oxford Handbook Tense and Aspect

Syntax – Tenseless

Past time reference

- Lisa zuótian dapò huapíng
Lisa yesterday break vase
(Lisa broke a vase yesterday.)

Future time reference

- Women míngtiān xiě zuòyè
We tomorrow write homework
(we are going to / will do the homework tomorrow)

Syntax - Aspect

- Wo qùnián qù **le** Beijing.
I last year go Perfect Peking
(I have gone to Peking last year. / I went to Peking last year.)
- Wo yijing chi **guò** (le).
I already eat Perfect.
(I have already eaten.)
- Ta chàng **zhe** ge
He sing Prog. Song.
(He is singing a song)

Syntax - Negation

- wo **bù** he shui
I no(pres./future) drink water
(I don't drink water.)
- wo **méi** he shui
I no(perfect) drink water
(I haven't drunk water.)
- wo **méi zài** he shui
I no Prog. drink water
(I'm not drinking water.)

Syntax - Negation

- Q: Dricker Johan inte kaffe? [Swedish]

drinks Johan not coffee

‘Does Johan not drink coffee?’

A: Nej.

no (‘He doesn’t drink coffee.’)

- Q: John m jam gaafe? [Cantonese]

John not drink coffee ‘Does John not drink coffee?’

A: hai

yes (‘John does not drink coffee.’)

Syntax - Negation

- answers to negative questions:
- *A negative yes/no-question, just like a neutral (non-negative) question, puts two alternative propositions before the interlocutor, p and $\neg p$, and asks them to say which one is true. The effect of the negation is, to put it very simply, to bias the question towards one of the alternatives. In the present case, assume that the question is uttered upon seeing John decline the offer of a cup of coffee. In this situation the question conveys an expectation that the negative alternative is true. In a Swedish conversation, to confirm that the negative alternative $\neg p$ is true, I would use the negative answer particle. In a Cantonese conversation, I would use the affirmative answer particle to convey that same meaning.*
- *The Cantonese way of answering is known in the literature as the ‘agree/disagree system’ (Kuno 1973, Pope 1976, Sadock and Zwicky 1985) or alternatively the ‘truth-based system’ (Jones 1999), while the Swedish way of answering is called the ‘positive/negative system’ or the ‘polarity-based system’.*

Anders Holmberg, The syntax of yes and no. 1.3 How to answer negative questions

Syntax - Classifier

- Very complicated classifier system.
- Like in English : a piece of paper, a bar of chocolate ...
- It is also possible : an umbrella, a tree, a dog, three cats ...
- But in Chinese, there should always be a classifier between the amount and none, and they are always different depending on the nouns.
- E.g. yì **ba** san
one Clas. umbrella
san **zhi** mao
three Clas. cat

Syntax - Adjunct or clause

- The Chinese people usually use short sentences instead of long ones with relative clauses as in other languages.
- The adjuncts are always at the left side.
- E.g. This is **my favorite present** that **my mother bought me** during her trip **in Paris three years ago**.

这是**我最喜欢的****我妈妈****三年前****在巴黎****旅行期间****给我买**的礼物。

or in several short sentences.

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Thank you for
your attention!