

Typological study of word order (7) : Chinese

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0. Introduction

The present work is the seventh installment of my typological study of word order, following Tsunoda (1988, 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1990c, 1990d). (Tsunoda (1988) deals with Japanese). This series was previously entitled 'Typological study of word order in languages of the Pacific region'. Starting with the present installment, it has a shorter title. Future installments will deal with languages outside the Pacific region as well.

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1. Name of language

Mandarin Chinese, which is one — and also the most predominant — of the several dialects of Chinese. In the language, Chinese is called *Zhōngguó-huà* 'China-speech' or *Zhōngwén* 'China language'. The official language of the People's Republic of China, largely based on the Beijing dialect, which is a variety of Mandarin Chinese, is known as *Pǔtōng-huà* 'common speech'. The official language of Taiwan, which is also based on the Beijing dialect but is slightly different from *Pǔtōng-huà*, is called *Guóyǔ* 'national language'.

2. Source of information

Largely Li and Thompson (1981), supplemented by Li and Thompson (1978, 1987) and also by Wu Lingfei (p. c.).

3. Genetic affiliation

Chinese, including Mandarin Chinese and other dialects, is a member of the Chinese branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family.

4. Geographical distribution

Approximately 70 % of the total Chinese population speak Mandarin Chinese as their first language, covering about 75% of the land area of China. It is also the official language of Taiwan.

5. Morphological and other relevant facts

Roughly speaking, Chinese has the neutral system (St=Si=O), in which one and the same case without any overt case manifestation, refers to the three syntactic functions: transitive subject, intransitive subject and object—except that it has *bǎ* to mark a definite object; for examples, see (d) of 6 below. Generally, nouns show no distinction regarding number, person or gender, and verbs manifest no distinction regarding tense, although they show aspect distinction by means of suffixation; for examples, see the examples in 6 below, among others.

Abbreviations employed are the following: CL, classifier; DEF OBJ, definite object; GEN, genitive; NEG, negation; p. c., personal communication; PERF, perfective; Q, question; REL, relative clause; SG, singular.

6. Subject, object and verb

The relative order of the S, the O and the V is not rigid; it is influenced by various factors. For example, with respect to the intransitive subject, the preverbal position signals definiteness. Compare:

(a) Zéi pǎo le.

thief run PERF 'The thief has ran away'.

(b) Pǎo le zéi.

run PERF thief 'A thief has run away'.

Similarly for the object. (As noted in 5 above, the definite object is

generally preceded by the definite object marker *bǎ*.) Compare:

(c) Wǒ mǎi shū le.

I buy book PERF 'I bought *a* book'.

(d) Wǒ bǎ shū mǎi le.

I DEF OBJ book buy PERF 'I bought *the* book'.

A definite object can precede the verb, indicating contrast. In such a case, it does not involve the definite object marker *bǎ*. Compare (d) with:

(e) Wǒ shū mǎi le.

I book buy PERF 'I bought *the book*.' (contrastive)

A definite object can also occur before the subject, announcing what the speaker is going to talk about (i.e. the topic) or indicating contrast. Again, it does not involve the definite object marker *bǎ*.

(f) Shū wǒ mǎi le.

book I buy PERF '*The book*, I bought it'. (Topic or contrastive)

As we have said above, the relative order of the S, the O and the V is not rigid. Nonetheless, statistically, the SVO order is the most frequent, followed by the SOV order.

With respect to the position of the indirect object, when it is preceded by a preposition, it can either follow the direct object, e.g. (g) or precede, e.g. (h). But when it does not involve a preposition, it has to occur before the direct object (and after the verb), e.g. (i). Thus, examples involving *sòng* 'give':

(g) Wǒ sòng-le yì píng jiǔ gěi tā.

I give-PERF one bottle wine to he, she
'I gave a bottle of wine to him/her.'

(h) Wǒ sòng-le gěi tā yì píng jiǔ.

I give-PERF to he, she one bottle wine 'As above.'

(i) Wǒ sòng-le tā yì píng jiǔ.

I give-PERF he, she one bottle wine
'I gave him/her a bottle of wine'.

(Note that the contrast between (g) and (i) parallels the occurrence/

non-occurrence of the preposition *to* in English; *to* occurs when the indirect object occurs after the direct object, but it disappears when the indirect object precedes.) (The perfective marker is written without a hyphen in the examples (a) to (f), but it is written with a hyphen in (g) to (h). This is due to Li and Thompson's analysis and/or presentation.)

Wu Lingfei (p. c.) states that, in (h), the perfective marker *le* cannot occur immediately following the verb, and that it occurs either after *gěi*, as in (j), or after *tā*, as in (k).

(j) Wǒ sòng gěi le tā yì píng jiǔ

I give to PERF he, she one bottle wine 'As (h).'

(k) Wǒ sòng gěi tā le yì píng jiǔ. 'As (h).'

7. Adposition

Chinese possesses prepositions, but appears to lack postpositions.

cóng	Zhōngguó	qù	Zhōngguó	lí	zhèlǐ	zài	nàr
from	China	to	China	from	here	at	there
'from	China'	'to	China'	'from	here'	'over	their'

There are many words which can be used both as a preposition and as a verb, e. g. *qù* 'to' and 'go'; *gěi* 'to for' and 'give', e. g. (g) and (h) in 6 above; and *zài* 'at' and 'be, exist', e. g. (k), (l) of 16, and (a) of 24.

There are also a small number of suffixes that denote location; for examples, see (k) and (l) of 16 below.

8. Genitive and noun

The genitive is expressed by the suffix *-de* 'of', and it precedes the noun it modifies:

wǒ-de	érzi	wǒ-de	qìchē	tāmen-de	jiā	tùzi-de	ěrduō
I-GEN	son	I-GEN	car	they-GEN	home	rabbit-GEN	ear
'my	son'	'my	car'	'their	home'	'(a)rabbit's	ear'
Zhōngguó-de	rénkǒu	Táiwān-huà-de	yǔfǎ				
China-GEN	population	Taiwan-speech-GEN	grammar				

'China's population' '(the) grammar of Taiwanese'

The genitive suffix *-de* is optional when the possessor is expressed by a (personal) pronoun and possession noun refers to human relative. For example, in the following examples, *-de* can be omitted:

- (a) Wǒ bu xǐhuan nǐ(-de) mèimei.
 I NEG like you(SG)(-GEN) younger sister
 'I do not like your(SG) younger sister'.
- (b) Zhāngsān xiàng tā(-de) māma.
 Zhangsan resemble he, she(-GEN) mother
 'Zhangsan looks like his mother'.

9. Demonstrative and noun

The demonstrative precedes the noun. Examples include (b) and (c) of 14 below and:

nèi-běn	shū	nèi-zuo	fàngzi	zhèi-zhǎn	dēng
that-classifier	book	that-CL	house	this-CL	lamp
'that house'		'that book'		'this lamp'	

The demonstrative has to be accompanied by a classifier suffix when the modified noun has a singular referent. (But generally no classifier suffix is used when the modified noun has a plural referent.) The classifier employed varies depending on the type of the noun concerned. Regarding the examples given above, *-běn* is the classifiers for nouns denoting books, *-zuo* for nouns referring to buildings, etc., *-zhǎn* for nouns describing lamps, electric lights. The general classifier *-ge* can be used for most nouns. See 10; (b) of 12; (c) of 14; and (e) and (i) of 16 below.

10. Numeral and noun

The numeral precedes the noun:

sān-ge	rén	sì-tiáo	shé	wu-jià	fēijī
three-CL	person	four-CL	snake	five-CL	airplane
'three people'		'four snakes'		'five airplanes'	

(*-tiáo* is the classifier for nouns denoting thin and long objects, etc.,

while *-jià* is that for nouns expressing objects that stand.) In the examples above, the numerals are each accompanied by an appropriate classifier, but they are not always accompanied by one; see Li and Thompson (1981: 104-113).

11. Adjective and noun

The adjective precedes the noun:

hóng	huā	yuán	zhuōzi	xiǎo	júzi
red	flower	round	table	small	orange
'a red flower'		'a round table'		'a small orange'	

An adjective can also take the form of a relative clause, employing the relative clause marker *de* (cf. 12 below):

hóng	de	huā	yuán	de	zhōuzi
red	REL	flower	round	REL	table
'a flower that is red'			'a table that is round'		
xiǎo	de	júzi			
small	REL	orange	'an orange that is small'		

(The conditions under which *de* is employed are complicated; see Li and Thompson (1981: 117-23).)

12. Relative clause and noun

The relative clause precedes the main clause:

- (a) [Zhāngsān mǎi de] qìchē hěn guì.
 [Zhangsan buy REL] car very expensive
 'The car that Zhangsan bought is very expensive'.

When all of the elements that modify a noun occur together, their relative order is fixed according to one of the following two shemas:

- (i) genitive + demonstrative or numeral + relative + adjective + noun.
 (ii) genitive + relative + demonstrative or numeral + adjective + noun.

An example:

- (b) wǒ-de nèi-ge [zhù zāi Měiguó de] hǎo péngyou
 I-GEN that-CL [live at America REL] good friend
 'that good friend of mine who lives in the United States'

13. Proper noun and common noun

The proper noun precedes the common noun:

Sāng	Shūshū	Dàhuá	Fàndiàn	Xīnhuá	Lù
Sang	uncle	Dahua	Hotel	Xinhua	Road
'Uncle	Sang'	'Dahua	Hotel'	'Xinhua	Road'
Xīngguó	xuéxiào				
Xinguo	school				
'Xinguo	School'				

The title follows the name:

Zhāng	Xiānsheng	Huáng	Xiǎojiě	Wū	Jiàoshòu
Zhang	Mr.	Huang	Miss	Wu	Professor
'Mr. Zhang'		'Miss Huang'		'Professor Wu'	

The family name precedes the given name:

Lù	Wényì	Zhāng	Měiyīng
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14. Comparison

Chinese lacks comparative forms of adjectives. Consider:

(a) Tā bǐ ni gāo.

he, she you (SG) tall 'He/she is taller than you are'.

The word *bǐ* is a verb that means 'compare (with)'. But in expressions such as (a), it is regarded as a preposition (Li and Thompson 1981: 368). Then, the word order is Marker-Standard-Adjective.

The superlative is formed by placing *zuì* 'most' or *dǐng* 'most' before an adjective (or a verb. In this language, adjectives are a subtype or verbs.) Examples:

(b) Zhèitiáo wéijīn zuì hǎo.

this-CL scarf most good 'This scarf is the best'.

(c) Nèi-ge xióng dǐng piàoliàng.

that-CL bear most pretty 'That bear is the prettiest'.

(The two words *zuì* and *dǐng* are not interchangeable; for details, see Li and Thompson (1981: 141-47, 571).)

15. Main verb and auxiliary verb

An auxiliary verb precedes the main verb, and generally it immediately precedes the main verb, e. g.:

(a) Tā néng shuō Zhōngguó-huà.
 he, she can speak China-speech 'He/she can speak Chinese'.
 be able to

(b) Nǐ yīnggāi kàn.
 you(SG) ought to, should look 'You should have a look'.

Other examples include *huì* 'will, know how' and *yīnggāi* 'ought to should' in (a) of 23 and *néng* 'can in (a) of 24; see 22 below. Furthermore, there are two examples in which some other constituent intervenes between the auxiliary verb and the main verb. In (c), the object intervenes, while in (d) a prepositional phrase does:

(c) (The nail for hanging the painting has fallen out, so:)
 Wǒ děi tā guà-hǎo.

I must, ought to it hang-well 'I have to hang it right'.

Wu Lingfei (p. c.) states that (c) (provided by Li and Thompson) is inadequate as it stands. The object *tā* can occur in the position it occupies only if it is preceded by the definite object marker *bǎ*. Without the definite object marker, *tā* has to follow *guà-hǎo*.

(d) (When the history department has its meeting:)

Wǒ kěyǐ gēn Lǐsì tí-yì-tí.

I be able to, have permission to with Lisi mention-one-mention
 'I can mention (it) to Lisi'.

16. Adverb and verb

Time adverbs can occur either sentence-initially or after the subject, e. g.:

(a) Jīntiān wǒ bù shūfu.
 today I not comfortable 'Today I don't feel well'.

(b) Wǒ jīntiān bù shūfu. 'As above'.

Additional examples are in (e) and (f) of 22 below.

Similarly for attitude adverbs, which 'denote the speaker's attitude

toward or evaluation of the event expressed by the sentence' (Li and Thompson 1981: 321), e. g.:

(c) Xiǎnrán Zhāngsān bu gāoxing.

obviously Zhangsan NEG happy

'Obviously, Zhangsan is not happy'.

(d) Zhāngsān xiǎnrán bu gāoxing. 'As above'.

Manner adverbs occur after the subject and before the object, or before the verb if the sentence contains no object:

(e) Wǒmen kēxué-de yánjiū nèi-ge wèntí.

we scientifically research that-CL problem

'We will research that problem scientifically'.

(f) Tā kuài-kuài-de zǒu.

he, she quickly walk 'He/she walked quickly'

A further example is in (b) of 22 below.

'When a sentence contains both an adverb and an auxiliary verb, the adverb always precedes the auxiliary verb. In other words, the adverb remains immediately after the verb, as here' (Li and Thompson 1981: 320):

(g) Zhāngsān yīdìng néng tiàowǔ.

Zhangsan definitely can dance 'Zhangsan definitely can dance'.

(However, an adverbial phrase, not just an adverb, can intervene between an auxiliary verb and the main verb: see 'with Lisi' in (d) of 15 above.)

Furthermore, 'time phrases' and 'locative phrases' show semantic differences depending on their position (Li and Thompson 1981: 21-23). 'Preverbal time phrases tend to signal punctual time, while postverbal time phrases tend to signal durative time... The following sentences illustrate this semantic tendency:'

(g) Wǒ sān-diǎnzhōng kāi-huì.

I three-o'clock hold-meeting

'I have a meeting at three o'clock'.

(h) *Wǒ kài-huì sān-diǎnzhōng

I hold-meeting three-o'clock

The compound verb *kāi-huì* 'hold a meeting' has a punctual meaning. Therefore, the ex. (g), in which the time phrase occurs before the verb, is acceptable, whereas (h), in which the time phrase comes after the verb, is unacceptable. Now, compare :

- (i) Wǒ shuì-le sān-ge zhōngtòu.
I sleep-PERF three-CL hour 'I slept for three hours'.
(j) *Wǒ sān-ge zhōngtòu shuì le.
I three-CL hour sleep PERF

(To be precise, when *le* occurs sentence-finally, its function and meaning seem to be somewhat different from when it occurs within a sentence; for details, see Chapters 6 and 7 of Li and Thompson (1981).) The verb *shuì* 'sleep' has a durative meaning, and the situation is reversed. The ex. (i), in which the time phrase occurs after the verb, is acceptable, whereas the ex. (j), in which the time phrase comes before the verb, is unacceptable.

With respect to 'locative phrases', 'In general, preverbal position signal location of actions, while postverbal position signals location of a person/thing as a result of the action'. Thus, compare :

- (k) Tā zài zhuōzi-shang tiào.
he, she at table-on jump
'He/she jumped (up and down) on the table'.
(l) Tā tiào zài zhuōzi-shang.
he, she jump at table-on 'He/she jumped onto the table'.

17. Adverb and adjective

Adverbs such as *hǎo* 'very', *hěn* 'very', *tài* 'too', *bǐjiào* 'relatively', etc. precede the adjective. Examples include (a) of 12 above and :

- (a) Nèi-suǒ fàngzi hǎo guì.
that-CL house very expensive 'That house is very expensive'.
See also (b) and (c) of 14 above, where an adverb precedes the adjective it modifies.

18. General questions

Mandarin Chinese has several processes for forming general questions. Firstly, a declative sentence can be turned into an interrogative sentence by means of a slightly rising intonation. Thus:

- (a) Nǐ qù?
 you (SG) go 'Are you going?'

Secondly, a declarative sentence can be turned into an interrogative sentence by placing the question marker *ma* at the end of the sentence:

- (b) Nǐ xǐhuan Xiān ma?
 you (SG) like Xian Q 'Do you like Xian?'

(Mandarin Chinese has two more question markers: *ba* and *ne*, both of which occur sentence-finally. For details, see Li and Thompson (1981: 305-11).)

Thirdly, an affirmative and a negative version of the same sentence can be combined to make what is known as an 'A-not-A question'. Thus:

- (c) Nǐ xǐhuan-bu-xǐhuan tā?
 you (SG) like-NEG-like he, she 'Do you like him/her?'
- (d) Tā chī-bu-chī pīngguǒ?
 he, she eat-NEG-eat apple 'Does he/she eat apples?'
- (e) Tā duì nǐ hǎo-bu-hǎo?
 he, she to you (SG) good-NEG-good 'I he/she good to you?'

General questions show no difference in word order from the corresponding declarative sentences.

19. Inversion of subject and verb in general questions

This inversion does not occur.

20. Special questions

In general, an interrogative word occurs in the position that would be occupied by an equivalent word in the corresponding declarative sentence. Examples:

- (a) Shéi zhǎo tā?
who look for he, she 'Who is looking for him/her?'
- (b) Nǐ mài shénme?
you(SG) sell what 'What do you sell?'
- (c) Tā zài nǎlǐ yóuyong?
he, she at where swim 'Where does he/she swim?'
- (d) Nǐ mǎi-le duōshǎo rìlì?
you (SG) buy-PERF how many calendar
'How many calendars did you buy?'
- (e) Tā duō gāo?
he, she how tall 'How tall is he/she?'

21. Inversion of subject and verb in special questions

This inversion does not occur.

22. Negative sentences

Mandarin Chinese has four words for negation. In general, they follow the subject and precede the predicate—although some other constituent, such as an adverb or a prepositional phrase (a type of adverb phrase), may intervene. Among the four words for negation, the most general and neutral is *bu* 'not'. It can be used when the predicate is a verb, e. g. (a) and (b), or an adjective (which is really a sub-type of verb), e. g. (c).

- (a) Wǒ bu jìde tā.
I NEG remember he, she 'I don't remember him/her.'
- (b) Tā bu màn-màn-de qí jiǎotāchē.
he, she not slowly ride bicycle
'He/she does not ride a bike slowly.'
- (c) Zhāngsān bu pàng.
Zhangsan NEG fat 'Zhangsan is not fat'.

When a given sentence contains an auxiliary verb (as well as the main verb), *bu* 'not' generally precedes it, e. g. :

(d) Wǒ bu néng qù.

I NEG can go 'I cannot go'.

To be precise, however, the above statements on the position of *bu* 'not' need some modification. For example, certain adverbs can either precede or follow *bu*, manifesting a difference in terms of the 'scope of negation. That is, when it precedes *bu*, it is outside the scope of negation and consequently is not negated, while on the other hand when it follows *bu*, it is within the scope of negation and consequently it is negated. Compare:

(e) Tā jīngchāng bu hē jiǔ.

he, she often NEG drink wine

'Often he/she does not drink wine'.

(f) Tā bu jīngchāng hē jiǔ.

he, she NEG often drink wine

'He/she does not drink wine often'.

As another pair of examples:

(g) Tā gùyì bu shuō-huà.

he, she deliberately NEG talk-word

'He/she is deliberately not talking'.

(h) Tā bu gùyì zuò huài shì.

he, she NEG deliberately do bad deed

'He/she does not deliberately do bad things'.

(Note that a parallel phenomenon obtains in the English translations given above regarding the relationship between the scope of negation and the relative position of *not* and the adverb concerned.)

The same applies to certain auxiliary verbs. Thus, compare (d) above, in which *néng* 'can' follows *bu* 'not' and is negated by it, with the following example, in which *néng* 'can' precedes *bu* 'not' and is not negated by it:

(i) Wǒ néng bu qù.

I can NEG go 'I'm capable of not going'.

Negative sentences show no difference in word order from the corresponding affirmative sentences.

23. Conditional clause and main clause

The conditional clause must precede the main clause (Wu Lingfei, p. c.).

- (a) Yàoshi nǐ bu huì yóuyǒng, nǐ bu yīnggāi
 if you(SG) NEG know how swim you(SG) NEG should
 qù huá chuán.
 go row boat
 'If you can't swim, you shouldn't go rowing',

24. Purpose clause and main clause

The purpose clause must precede the main clause (Wu Lingfei, p. c.).

(The following example was provided by Wu.)

- (a) Wèi le Fāngfang néng chūmén Xiǎomíng dài zài jiā le.
 in order Fangfang can go out Xiaoming stay at house PERF
 'Xiaoming stayed home so that Fangfang could go out'.

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