

AN INTRODUCTION TO MODERN CHINESE VOCABULARY

现代汉语词汇概论



SINOLINGUA BEIJING

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Preface

An Introduction to Modern Chinese Vocabulary is a modern Chinese primer intended for foreign students majoring in modern Chinese and those with the corresponding level taking refresher courses of the language. It is also good for other foreigners with the corresponding level pursuing self-taught courses of basic knowledge about Chinese vocabulary.

The book aims to briefly introduce basic knowledge about modern Chinese vocabulary, including the formation of words, the characteristics of basic vocabulary, the classification of vocabulary, the idioms, proverbs and *xiehouyu*, and the study and use of words; and to guide foreign students to correct completion of the many exercises designed to train them in practical skills. Using this book, the students will arrive at an overall knowledge of modern Chinese vocabulary, become acquainted with its characteristics, grasp the methods of word formation and those of discriminating synonyms, understand the functions of various types of vocabulary and the requirements in learning and using the words, and enhance the ability of analysing, understanding and using them.

Each chapter is followed by a set of "Problems and Exercises", and a "Key" to the exercises is to be found at the end of the book.

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The compiler
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Chapter I

Word Structure

Section 1 Words

1. Morphemes

Words are constructed with morphemes. The morpheme is the smallest distinctive unit in the composition of words in the language.

Morphemes have a distinctive lexical or grammatical meaning, but they cannot usually occur as separate words. For instance, in 语言, the morphemes 语 and 言 both have a distinctive meaning, but generally do not occur separately. Some morphemes which do have independent meaning, in fact, often have a meaning different to the words composed of those morphemes. For example, 商量 is a verb, meaning “discuss”, and is composed of the morphemes 商 and 量. But in the expressions 工农商学兵 and 量一量体温, 商 means “a person working in commerce” and is a noun, while 量 means “measure” and is a verb.

Morphemes may be divided into main components and additional components depending a meaning and function in the composition of the word. Major components are called “roots”, while the components which add meaning to the roots are called, according to their position in the word, “prefix”, “suffix” and “embedded” components.

2. What Is a Word?

The basic practical unit of language is the sentence. The sentence is composed of words.

The word is the minimal linguistic unit that may be independently employed in language. It incorporates both meaning and sound.

“Independently employed” indicates that it does not rely on other components, itself having a syntactical function—acting as a component of a sentence or expressing a grammatical relationship. 北京 is a word, and may perform as one of several components in a sentence, as in: 北京是中华人民共和国的首都 (subject); 我过去来过北京 (object); 我在北京学习 (prepositional object); 北京的风景很美 (attribute); 解放后的北京已经变成了一个生产城市 (head word). 和 is a word; it links words or phrases, demonstrating grammatical relationships, as in: 我和你, 老师和学生, 几个工厂和一些学校.

By “minimal unit” is meant a unit that can not be practically divided into still smaller units, either because the word itself consists of only one syllable or 字 as with 人 and 事, or — even though the word is multisyllabic — because the syllables standing alone have no meaning, as with 玫, 瑰 and 玻, 璃; only when these syllables are taken together — 玫瑰 (méiguī), 玻璃 (bōli) — do they possess meaning. Thirdly, there are multisyllabic words the separate syllables of which do possess meaning, but that meaning is different to that of the original undivided word, for example, the 年 or 轻 of 年轻, the 大 or 衣 of 大衣.

3. Monosyllabic and Multisyllabic Words

In Chinese words can be divided into monosyllabic and multisyllabic words. In written form, one Chinese character normally represents one syllable, so a single = character word is also known as a monosyllabic word, while a double = or multiple = character word is also known as a polysyllabic word. For example:

人, rén; 马, mǎ; 山, shān; 水, shuǐ; 鱼, yú; 虫, chóng; each representing one syllable and, therefore, constituting a monosyllabic word;

劳动, láodòng; 生活, shēnghuó; 旅游, lǚyóu; 学习,

xuéxí, each pair of characters representing two syllables and, therefore, constituting disyllabic or polysyllabic words;

机械化, jīxièhuà; 社会主义, shèhuìzhǔyì; 联合收割机, liánhé shōugējī, consisting of three, four and five characters, respectively, each character representing a syllable, are all polysyllabic words.

But Chinese also has characters that do not equate with syllables. The 儿 -r suffix, in particular, should be noted. For instance, although 花儿 in written form are two characters, they represent only one syllable read huār, and are therefore a monosyllabic word. Although 一块儿 yíkuair in written form are three characters, they represent but two syllables — the word is thus disyllabic rather than polysyllabic.

Of the polysyllabic words in Chinese, disyllabic words constitute the majority. During the ancient period (Shang to Han — 16th century B.C. to 3rd century A.D.) and the middle ancient period (Wei to Tang — 3rd to 10th centuries A.D.) the majority of Chinese words were monosyllabic. In the modern and contemporary periods, numerous polysyllabic words sprang up and gradually became the dominant group, with disyllabic compound words in the majority. Derivational affixes also became more numerous in modern times, disyllabic forms again being the most common.

4. Simple and Compound Words

Words in Chinese may also be divided, with regard to internal structural form of the word, into simple words and compound words. In Chinese, most monosyllabic words are simple words. Simple words can not be further broken down, because these words in terms of meaning are already the minimal meaningful units, for instance: 风, 雨, 牛, 马, 来, 去, 好, 坏, 文, 武 which can not be further decomposed into morphemes. However, there are a few monosyllabic words, such as huār 花儿 mentioned above, which are not simple words because they can be broken down into morphemes.

Words composed of two or more meaningful components are compound words. The majority of polysyllabic words in Chinese are compound words and can be broken down; for instance, 生产, 同志, 文学, 创造性, 现实主义。 But, there are some polysyllabic words which belong to the class of simple words and can not be broken down, such as 萝卜 (luóbo), 玻璃 (bōli), 牡丹 (mǔdān) and 仿佛 (fǎngfú).

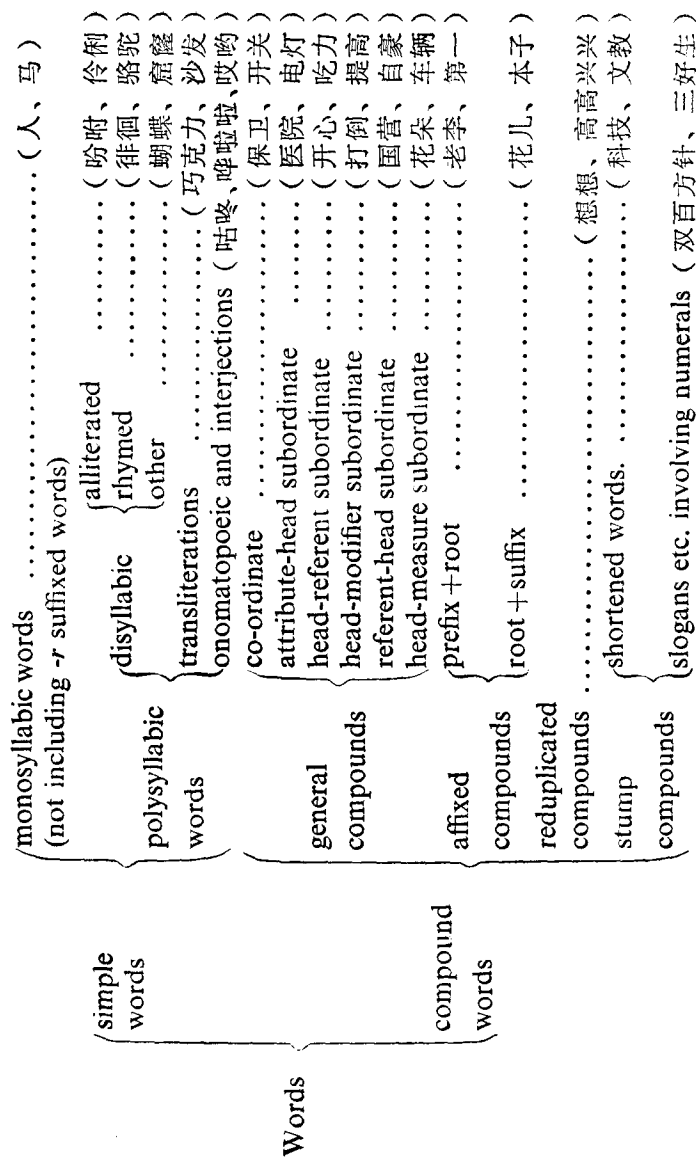
Section 2 Word-formation

Chinese has a rich vocabulary, and word-formation is just as rich and varied. To understand the meaning and use of words correctly it is necessary to study the structure of words, and the key to studying word structure is an examination of the composition of polysyllabic words.

Apart from simple words and compound words, there also exists in Chinese a category of abbreviations, many of which have become compound words, which are also known as “stump” compounds.

Word-formation in Chinese may be summarised as follows:

1. Types of Word-Formation



2. Structural Pattern of Simple Words

1) Monosyllabic words (as described above)

2) Disyllabic words

These are words consisting of two syllables which can not be separated. The majority consist of alliterative or rhyming syllables. There is also a category of other disyllabic, simple words which are neither alliterative nor rhyming. For example:

| | Nouns | Adjectives | Verbs |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Alliterative Words | 琉璃 (liúli) l.l. | 含糊 (hánhu) h.h. | 吩咐 (fēnfù) f.f. |
| | 秋千 (qiūqiān) q.q. | 伶俐 (línglì) l.l. | 躊躇 (chóuchú) ch.ch. |
| | 蜘蛛 (zhīzhū) zh.zh. | 恍惚 (huǎnghū) h.h. | 弥漫 (mímàn) m.m. |
| Rhyming Words | 玫瑰 (méiguì) -èi-èi | 糊涂 (hútu) -u-u | 哆嗦 (duōsuo) -uo-uo |
| | 葫芦 (húlu) -u-u | 灿烂 (cànlàn) -an-an | 咆哮 (páoxiāo) -ao-ao |
| | 骆驼 (luòtuo) -uo-uo | 蜿蜒 (wānyán) -an-an | 唠叨 (láodao) -ao-ao |
| Other | 疙瘩 (gēda) | 马虎 (mǎhu) | 蹂躏 (róulìn) |
| | 窟窿 (kūlong) | 憔悴 (qiáocùi) | 拾掇 (shíduo) |
| | 蝴蝶 (húdié) | 麻利 (máli) | 翱翔 (áoxiáng) |

3) Transliterated words

There are several types of words borrowed from other languages, among which is the transliterated word. Transliterated words are composed of Chinese characters the sounds of which

are approximate to those of the foreign words. The characters, or syllables, naturally merely represent sound and not meaning. For instance:

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------|---------------------------------------|
| Disyllabic words: | 逻辑 | luóji logic |
| | 雷达 | léidá radar |
| Trisyllabic words: | 麦克风 | màikèfēng microphone |
| | 法西斯 | fǎxīsi fascist |
| Quadrisyllabic words: | 罗曼谛克 | luómàndìkè romantic |
| | 布尔乔亚 | bù'ěrqiáoyà bourgeois |
| Words with five and more syllables: | 德漠克拉西 | démòkèlāxī democracy |
| | 英特耐雄纳尔 | Yīngtènàixióngnà'ěr Internationale |

4) Onomatopoeic words and interjections

Apart from monosyllabic onomatopoeic words, there are also polysyllabic onomatopoeic words. The characters used to represent these sounds are totally devoid of their original meaning. Examples of such words are 扑通 pūtōng (sound of flopping or thumping), 哗啦 huālā (rustling, crashing), 滴答 dīdā (ticking, pitter-pattering), 叮当 dīngdāng (tintinnabulation), 轰隆 hōnglōng (rumbling). As for interjections, apart from monosyllabic interjections, there are a few polysyllabic words such as 哎呀 āiyā, 哎哟 āiyō.

3. Structural Pattern of Compound Words

1) General compounds

a. Co-ordinate compounds. Two morphemes identical or similar in meaning may be joined together to form a word. For example:

| | | | | | |
|--------|---------|--------|---------|---------|--------|
| 人民 | 朋友 | 计算 | 刚才 | 思想 | 智慧 |
| rénmín | péngyou | jìsuàn | gāngcái | sīxiǎng | zhìhuì |

Alternatively, two morphemes antithetic or opposite in

meaning may also be joined together to form a word. For example:

| | | |
|----------------|---------------|--------------|
| 是非 shífēi | 开关 kāiguān | 买卖 mǎimài |
| 反正 fǎnzhèng | 呼吸 hūxī | 矛盾 máodùn |

b. Attribute-head subordinate compounds. A compound word consisting of two morphemes — a modifier (the attribute) and the modified morpheme (the head):

| | | | |
|----------------|----------------|-------------|---------------|
| 火车 huǒchē | 电灯 diàndēng | 大衣 dàyī | 坚持 jiānchí |
| 重视 zhòngshì | 小看 xiǎokàn | 热爱 rè'ài | |

c. Head-referent subordinate compounds. The referent or “object” morpheme is placed after the head morpheme (verbal or adjectival):

| | | | |
|---------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|
| 带头 dàitóu | 动员 dòngyuán | 负责 fùzé | 因此 yīncǐ |
| 举重 jǔzhòng | 费事 fèishì | 有限 yǒuxiàn | |

d. Head-modifier subordinate compounds. Words of the head-modifier type are compounds in which the head (verbal or adjectival) morpheme is followed by a “modifier” morpheme:

| | | | |
|-----------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|
| 证明 zhèngmíng | 缩小 suōxiǎo | 扩大 kuòdà | 抓紧 zhuājǐn |
| 推广 tuīguǎng | 提高 tígāo | 兴起 xīngqǐ | |

e. Referent-head subordinate compounds. Referent-head compounds have a “nominal” subject-type head followed by a predicate-type referent:

| | | | |
|---------|---------|----------|---------|
| 地震 | 心疼 | 年轻 | 国营 |
| dìzhèn | xīnténg | niánqīng | guóyíng |
| 面熟 | 性急 | 自豪 | |
| miànshú | xìngjí | zìháo | |

f. Head-measure type subordinate compounds. In this type a monosyllabic morpheme, a nominal head, is combined with a measure word type morpheme to produce compounds such as:

| | | | |
|--------|----------|----------|----------|
| 人口 | 车辆 | 书本 | 纸张 |
| rénkǒu | chēliàng | shūběn | zhǐzhāng |
| 花朵 | 马匹 | 房间 | |
| huāduǒ | mǎpǐ | fángjiān | |

2) Affixed compounds

Affixed compounds consist of basic components (roots) to which are a fixed — prefixed or suffixed — a further morpheme.

a. prefix + root:

第 + 一 (二、三) → 第一 (第二、第三)

初 + 一 (二、次) → 初一 (初二、初次)

b. Root + suffix:

刀、棍、把 + 儿 → 刀儿、棍儿、把儿

胖、刀、拍 + 子 → 胖子、刀子、拍子

砖、甜 + 头 (+ 儿) → 砖头 (儿)、甜头 (儿)

3) Reduplication

Reduplication is a kind of word-formation in which words or their constituent morphemes are reduplicated to form new words or different forms of original words. Chinese mea-

sure words or classifiers, verbs and adjectives are often reduplicated, while other parts of speech are more rarely reduplicated.

Examples:

| Word Class | (Monosyllabic) Reduplication (Polysyllabic) | | |
|------------|---|--|---|
| Measure | 件 ^ˋ 件 ^ˋ 支 ^ˋ 支 ^ˋ 个 ^ˋ 个 ^ˋ | | Meaning “each”, “every”. |
| | 条 ^ˊ 条 ^ˊ 儿 块 ^ˋ 块 ^ˋ 儿 | | Becomes a noun, the second syllable adopting the neutral tone. |
| Verb | 听 ^ˋ 听 ^ˋ 写 ^ˋ 写 ^ˋ | 研究 ^ˊ 研究 ^ˊ 庆祝 ^ˋ 庆祝 ^ˋ | When a single morpheme word is reduplicated, the second syllable of the new compound adopts the neutral tone. In dimorphemic words adopting the ABAB pattern of reduplication the second and fourth syllables of the resulting words adopt the neutral tone. |
| | 快 ^ˋ 快 ^ˋ 儿 (的、地) | 老 ^ˋ 老 ^ˋ 实 ^ˋ 实 ^ˋ | After reduplication of a monomorphemic word, the tone of the second syllable becomes first |

| | | | |
|--------------|----------------|--|---|
| Adjective | 亮亮儿 (的、地) | 大大方方 | tone and the -r suffix is appended to the terminal sound. Dimorphemic words reduplicated according to the AABB pattern, the second syllable adopts the neutral tone and the penultimate and final syllables adopt the first tone. The entire word may however be read with the original tonic values. |
| | 早早儿 (的、地) | 客客气气 | |
| Noun | 哥哥妹妹 宝宝星星 | | The second syllable adopts the neutral tone. |
| | 家家人人 | | Meaning "each", "every". |
| Numeral | 方方二二 | 千万千万 五十五十(地) 两万八(千) 两万八(千) (地) | Becomes a modifier or adverbial word. In general, all two and three digit figures may be reduplicated. |
| Pronoun | 每每 某某 | | |
| Adverbial | 刚刚 仅仅 渐渐 常常 | | |
| Onomatopoeic | 呼呼嗒嗒 | 嗒嗒嗒嗒 叮叮当当 叮当叮当 | |