
Mandarin Chinese

A
FUNCTIONAL
REFERENCE
GRAMMAR

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漢語語法

MANDARIN CHINESE

A Functional Reference Grammar

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and

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Preface

The aim of this reference grammar is to provide, for the first time, a description of Mandarin in functional terms. We attempt as much as possible to discuss the structural properties of sentences in the language in terms of the pragmatic situations in which they are used, that is, with an eye toward their entire communicative context. It is our conviction that only in terms of these functional factors can the grammar of a language be understood.

This grammar is explicitly designed for students and teachers of Mandarin, who are not necessarily linguists. Thus, we have tried to minimize the use of technical linguistic terminology, and those terms that do occur in the book are carefully defined. On the other hand, most of the analyses in this book are original. It is our hope, then, that linguists who are interested in a functional approach to the study of language will also find this book useful. We have attempted to present the empirical facts of Mandarin faithfully, describe the steps of our reasoning concisely, state the generalizations we arrive at clearly, and, whenever possible, provide a functional explanation of these generalizations. Needless to say, a grammar of any language is bound to be incomplete, and ours is no exception. It is in the hope that our effort may spur others on to further discoveries in the study of Chinese that we offer our analyses here.

It is worth noting that the written language in China is a heterogeneous mixture of the classical tradition based on the written literature before the twentieth century and modern colloquial Mandarin speech. Since the promulgation of Putonghua in mainland China, there has been a noticeable reduction of the classical component in most of the written material produced in the People's Republic of China. Nevertheless, a "classical" phrase or usage still makes its appearance here and there. We wish to make it clear that the classical language is not included in the scope of our analyses.

We are indebted to the work of a number of linguists and scholars who have contributed to the study of the Chinese language. Some of our examples are drawn from their writings, and some of our ideas can be traced either directly or indirectly to our predecessors and contemporaries in the study of Mandarin. To all of them, we owe our gratitude. Where we have drawn on their ideas, we have acknowledged this in the notes to each chapter, but we have not attempted to document the sources of our examples, which come largely from conversations in which we have participated and from our own knowledge of the language, as well as from the writings of other linguists and scholars.

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Conventions Used in Examples

1. (x): x is an optional element.
2. $\begin{Bmatrix} x \\ y \end{Bmatrix}$: either x or y.
3. *: an utterance that is either structurally or semantically unacceptable to native speakers.
4. *(x): to be acceptable the example must include x.
5. (*x): to be acceptable the example must not include x.
6. ?: an utterance that is odd but not necessarily unacceptable.
7. Glosses and translations:
 - a. Each Mandarin example has two lines of English below it. In the line immediately below the Mandarin example, we have attempted to gloss each Mandarin element with the clearest and most literal English equivalent possible. In the second line we offer a translation of the whole utterance into idiomatic English, attempting to preserve the "flavor" of the Mandarin utterance as much as we can.
 - b. Mandarin elements may often have more than one possible English gloss. In cases where the choice of gloss is context sensitive, we have used the gloss appropriate to the given context. For example, *duō* can be

glossed either as 'much' or as 'many'; in a sentence such as

- (i) tā yǒu hěn duō shū
 s/he exist very many book

S/He has a lot of books.

duō would be glossed as 'many' because it occurs with *shū* 'book', whereas in a sentence such as

- (ii) tā yǒu hěn duō qián
 3sg exist very much money

S/He has a lot of money.

duō would be glossed as 'much' because it occurs with *qián* 'money'.

- c. Mandarin nouns in general do not indicate singularity versus plurality. We gloss all Mandarin nouns as singular nouns in English.
- d. Mandarin has no grammatical category of *tense*, which means that many examples could be translated as either past or present tense in English. Rather than offering both possibilities for each such example, we have chosen arbitrarily to give either a past or a present tense translation. In each case, the discussion within which the examples are presented should make it clear whether a given construction could equally well be translated with an English present or past tense or whether the translation given is the only one it could have.
- e. Mandarin pronouns make no distinction between masculine and feminine. We have glossed *tā* as '3sg' and translated it as 's/he'.
- f. We have adopted the usage that is now conventional in linguistic scholarship of colons in glosses where it takes more than one English word to gloss a given Mandarin word. For example:

- (i) yīdiǎn
 a:little

- (ii) hàoxiē
 a:lot

8. Pinyin: the transcription system we use is *pīnyīn* (literally 'spell sound'), the official romanization system of the People's Republic of China, which is

also the most widely used system in the media and scholarly writings on Chinese in the West (see the Introduction):

- a. Syllables whose basic tone is third tone are given the third-tone diacritic even in environments where the third tone would change to second tone by tone sandhi. So, for example, we represent a word such as *xiǎo-niǎo* 'small bird, birdie' with two third tones, whereas in normal pronunciation, the tones should be *xiǎo-niǎo*, reflecting the application of the tone sandhi rule changing a third tone to a second tone before a third tone.
- b. There are two types of neutral-tone syllables (see the Introduction). Syllables of the first type always have the neutral tone, such as the aspect markers *-zhe*, *-le*, *-guo*, and the sentence-final particles *le*, *ne*, *ba*, and so forth; these are simply represented with no tone mark at all. Syllables of the second type, however, may vary between a full-tone pronunciation and a neutral-tone pronunciation. This variation may depend either on dialect differences or on the type of sentence in which the syllable occurs. The best example of variation due to dialect differences involves the pronunciation of the second syllable of many disyllabic words. For example, the word for 'clothes' is pronounced as *yīfu*, with the second syllable having a neutral tone, by some speakers and as *yīfú*, where the second syllable has a full tone, by other speakers, including most of those whose speech is influenced by Min and Yue languages. We have been arbitrary in representing such words: sometimes they are written with their full tone and sometimes with no tone mark. An example illustrating the influence of the sentence context in determining whether a syllable is pronounced with a full tone or a neutral tone is the variation in the pronunciation of *shì* 'be'. In a simple copula sentence, for instance, *shì* normally has no tone:

- | | | | |
|-----|----|------------|----------|
| (i) | wó | <u>shì</u> | Zhāngsān |
| | I | be | Zhangsan |

I am Zhangsan.

As a marker of affirmation, however, *shì* is typically pronounced with its full falling tone:

- | | | | | | | |
|------|----|------------|--------|-----|----------|------|
| (ii) | wò | <u>shì</u> | xǐhuān | chī | Zhōngguó | fàn |
| | I | be | like | eat | China | food |

It's true that I like to eat Chinese food.

We represent syllables such as these with their full tones, with the understanding that in some contexts they will be destressed and have a neutral tone.

- c. Exceptions to the generalization given just above are *bu* 'not' and *yi* 'one': not only can the pronunciation of these two syllables vary between a full tone and a neutral tone, but each has *different* full tones, depending on the tone of the syllable that follows. For the description of this variation for *bu* and *yi*, see Chao (1968:568). We have chosen not to mark these two syllables with tone diacritics, with the understanding that their pronunciation varies according to the sentences in which they occur.
9. Hyphens: We have attempted to be consistent in using hyphens between syllables in a Mandarin word only when each syllable has an independent meaning or use. Exceptions to this convention occur only in the chapter on compounds, where the structures of compound words are being analyzed. An example illustrating our use of hyphens is *chūbǎn* 'publish'. Although *chū* means 'put forth' and *bǎn* means 'board', we write *chūbǎn* as one word with no hyphen because the meaning 'publish' no longer has anything to do with 'put forth' and 'board'. Similarly, a word such as *xuéxiào* 'school' is written without a hyphen because, although *xué* 'learn, study' may occur independently, *xiào* 'school' may not. A word like *kàn-jiàn* 'see-perceive', on the other hand, is written with a hyphen because the two parts can function independently. It is impossible to be totally consistent on this matter, but we have tried to follow this principle to the best of our ability.
10. ~: This is a symbol used to gloss an undefinable object of a verb-object compound. An example is *bāng-máng* 'help-~ = to help'. The second syllable *máng* functions as an object of the verb *bāng* 'help'; but *máng* does not have any independent semantic content within the compound *bāng-máng*.

Abbreviations

ABBREVIATION	TERM	WHERE INTRODUCED, DISCUSSED, AND DEFINED
ASSOC	associative (<i>-de</i>)	4.2.2
BA	<i>bǎ</i>	15
BEI	<i>bèi</i>	16
CL	classifier	4.2.1
COMP	comparative	19
CRS	Currently Relevant State (<i>le</i>)	7.1
CSC	complex stative construction (<i>de</i>)	22
D.O.	direct object	4.3.1.B
DUR	durative aspect (<i>-zhe, zài</i>)	6.2
EXP	experiential aspect (<i>-guo</i>)	6.3
FW	Friendly Warning (<i>ou</i>)	7.4
GEN	genitive (<i>-de</i>)	4.2.2
I.O.	indirect object	10
NOM	nominalizer (<i>de</i>)	20
NP	noun phrase	4.2
ORD	ordinalizer (<i>dì-</i>)	3.1.2A
PFV	perfective aspect (<i>-le</i>)	6.1
PL	plural (<i>-men, -xie</i>)	3.1.2.C, 4.2.1
Q	question (<i>ma</i>)	18.5
REx	Response to Expectation (<i>ne</i>)	7.2
RF	Reduce Forcefulness (<i>a/ya</i>)	7.5
RVC	resultative verb compound	3.2.3.A
SA	Solicit Agreement (<i>ba</i>)	7.3
3sg	third person singular pronoun	

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