

A GRAMMAR OF
SPOKEN CHINESE

By

Yuen Ren Chao

中國話的文法

趙元任

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PREFACE

When I translated my *Cantonese Primer* into Mandarin—for that was what *Mandarin Primer* essentially was—I was going to use the same eight pages on grammar, except for some minor points in which Cantonese and Mandarin differ grammatically. But Fang-Kuei Li insisted that I write a fuller grammatical chapter, and so it was subsequently expanded to thirty-seven pages. No sooner, however, was *Mandarin Primer* published, in 1948, than Lien-Sheng Yang began to furnish me with additional materials and urged me to write a full-length book on the subject. For some time I had been jotting down notes and had written some articles on special topics in the grammar of spoken Chinese, but it was not until 1954, when I went to Europe on a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, that I decided to make a book project of it. Everybody laughed at my going to Europe for Chinese grammar. But when it was possible to exchange ideas with European students of modern Chinese, with men like Harry Simon, who were not only able to take part in but even conduct discussion groups in Chinese, with the whole paraphernalia of new terms, I found that going to Europe for Chinese grammar was, to change the figure a little, not entirely a matter of 东辕西辙.

Preoccupation with other, though related, matters delayed my progress on the book, but during my sojourn in the Orient in 1959 I was able to make profitable contacts, both in the way of theoretical discussion and in the collecting of raw material in the form of tape recording of live conversation.

Most of the actual writing of the book was, however, not begun until the fall of 1960, when the grammar project was given additional impetus by a grant under the National Defense Education Act of the Office of Education of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, under the terms of which I was able to obtain most of the needed assistance, linguistic and typographical

as well as calligraphic, and to put the book finally in the present form.

The Chinese title of this book, 中國話的文法 *Jonggwo Huah de Wenfaa*, is typical of the language under study, but very atypical as Chinese book titles go. Ordinarily one would call such a book 國語文法 *Gwoyue Wenfaa*, as Lii Jiinshi called his book, which title, though often criticized for its mixed figures, is perfectly good Chinese, because the mixture occurs at the level of bound morphemes. However, I am not using such a title, for the reason that *Gwoyue* connotes Standard Mandarin, and my emphasis has been to de-emphasize the standard aspect of Mandarin, since, especially in matters of grammar, most of what is said here about Mandarin is true of all Chinese, even of a good part of the literary language. Another natural title would be 中國口語之法 *Jonggwo Kooyue Yeufaa*. (Cf. Lii Rong's translation of chap. 3 of my *Mand Prim as Beeijing Kooyue Yeufaa*.) This is free of mixed figures, but both *kooyue* 'spoken language' and *yeufaa* 'grammar of speech' are newly coined learned terms and nobody would talk about *kooyue* or *yeufaa* in conversation except in technical discussions. Likewise, the now frequently used title 漢語之法 *Hannyue Yeufaa* (see bibliography) is a phrase of two words each of which is scientifically precise but not actually spoken except in contexts such as that of linguistic seminars. There is, to be sure, no necessity for naming a book in the language which is being described in the book, any more than a Chinese grammar has to be written in Chinese. But I prefer the present title because it sets the right tone for the subject matter of the book.

This is a discussion book and not an instruction book to learn Chinese grammar from. An attempt has, however, been made to use only examples which have been or can be said in real life. Special forms or styles, such as *wenyan*, written *bairhuah*, or dialects, will be so marked. As a discussion book, it is likely to raise more problems than it solves. I only invite the reader to consider problems with me as a fellow student of the subject. There is no editorial 'we', with its 'ourselves' in the singular, but only the inclusive 'we', meaning you the reader and I the writer studying the subject together; in other words, the 'we' in the

book is the 咱们 *tzarmen* 'we' rather than the 我们 *woomen* 'we'. When occasionally I do mean 'I', I say 'I'.

It is I, of course, who will now have the pleasant duty of acknowledging the help of all who have rendered moral support and linguistic sustenance in bringing this lengthy undertaking to a quasi-finished form—quasi-finished, because such a book is never finished but only considered as finished.

I have already referred to the early encouragements from Fang-Kuei Li and Lien-Sheng Yang, who also gave their time in going over the whole manuscript, with their helpful ideas, both theoretical and informational. With Fa-Kao Chou, the grammarian of classical Chinese, I have had much profitable exchange of views, especially regarding the comparison between the classical and the modern forms. Tsu-Lin Mei has been very helpful with his criticisms as logician-linguist. My daughter Rulan C. Pian stole a march on me by publishing her *Syllabus to Mandarin Primer* and I took my revenge by stealing back some of her examples without acknowledgment, taking them as common property. From Nicholas C. Bodman and Samuel E. Martin, who also waded through the whole thousand-page manuscript, I got much help and stimulation when they raised points of relevance which had escaped me as a native speaker, who took too much for granted. I wish also to acknowledge my debt to other writers on the subject, from Maa Jiannjong (馬建忠) down to my students and students' students, whose names are so numerous as to form practically an "open class", but they will appear in the bibliography and in the footnotes, not the least frequent of which refer to recalled conversations with the late Dr. Hu Shih on matters grammatical.

I must of course express my unreserved thanks to all who have at one time or another taken part in the actual preparation of the book: to Shih-Feng Yang for the initial calligraphic work and for making arrangements for recordings while I was in Taiwan; to Gari Ledyard, who summarized a large amount of published material for possible use; and to Jerry L. Norman, who rendered the greater part of the actual research assistance, ranging from calling to my attention new books and articles, to checking redundancies and inconsistencies in terminology, as well as in theory, in different parts of the book written years apart. To

Dorothy Lun Ballou thanks are due for the major part of the preparation of the manuscript, for the revision of the index, and for the calligraphy in the published book. The characters may look a little stiff in style, but I told her to make each one as nearly square as possible—except the character —!—in order to present a more uniform printed appearance. Her calligraphy, if it had not been so restricted, would have shown to better advantage. Last but not least, thanks are due to the staff of the University of California Press, especially to Grace W. Buzaljko, for undertaking so fussy, not to say so costly, a job for which I hope the result will give some justification.

A book of this length cannot but contain many errors of omission and commission, for which I alone am responsible and for the correction of which by readers I would be most appreciative.

Yuen Ren Chao

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USAGES OF THIS BOOK

1. Characters Used. Characters are used in citations of references and of illustrative examples.

(1) When necessary for clarity, titles of Chinese authors and works will be given in characters, for example, 陈澧, 切韵考 (Chern Lii, *Chieh Yunn Kao*), except well-known titles in English, for example *Shuo Wen*, *The Analects*, *Mencius*, and Hu Shih, *Collected Works*, ser. 1.

(2) Illustrative Examples. These are given in characters and in GR transcription, with an English gloss. The characters are included for the convenience of readers who feel more comfortable with them than with romanization. On abbreviated characters, see pp. xxv-xxvii.

Certain onomatopoeic and other words have no characters to write them. Fourteen are listed in *Conc Dict* (p. 251), of which the first one □ *bell* occurring in □ 棒 *bellbanq* 'very smart' probably comes from 倍儿 'doubly' and 棒 *banq* 'smart' (Peip. localism). The sixth word □ *geh* 'chafes' (for example, cinder in the eye) is probably a cognate of 梗, 哽, 鯁 *geeng* of the same semantic group. The others, such as □ *Pia!* 'Whack!' or 'Splash!', □ *Wo!* 'Giddap!', are morphemes without characters.

Somewhat different are cases where the usual spoken forms do not agree with the usual written forms. Since we are primarily concerned with the language as it is spoken and not so much with the way it is written, we are adopting, in the following cases, forms which reflect the speech better:

Now Usually Written	Meaning	To Be Written in This Book	To Be Spelled in This Book	Remark
他	'he'	他	<i>ta</i>	}
她	'she'			
它	'it'			

底	(reverse) 'of'	} 的	de	These new distinctions are not reflected in actual speech. On <i>de</i> , see sec. 5. 3. 6. 1.
的	's, -tic, etc.'			
地	'-ly'			
告愬	'tells'	告送	gaw.sonq	Cf. 木 mung in Hupeh; also cf. 告誦 in <i>Shiyou Jih</i> ("Monkey"), Chap. 23.
告诉				
(坐)在(这儿)	'at, to'	(坐)得(这儿)	(tzuoh) de (jell)	Blend of 在 <i>tzay</i> and 到 <i>daw</i> . See sec. 5. 6. 3.
早晨	'morning'	早晨	tiao.chin	Blend of 晨 <i>chern</i> and 起 <i>chii</i> .
早起				
这种	'this kind'	这种	jei.tzoong	Blend of 种 <i>joong</i> and 宗 <i>tzong</i> .
这么	'so'	这么	tzemme	From analogy with 怎么 <i>tzeeme</i> .

In the last example the forms *jehme* (with open vowel) and *jemme* (with checked vowel) are also spoken, though somewhat more formal in style than the more familiar *tzemme*.

For a fuller discussion of these points, see my 方言记录中汉字的功用 ("The Function of Chinese Characters in the Recording of the Dialects"), *Annals of Academia Sinica* (Taipei, 1954), vol. 1, pp. 117-128.)

2. Glossing

(1) Degrees of Literalness and Idiomaticalness. Illustrative examples will be given in characters, followed by romanization and a gloss. A literal translation and an idiomatic translation,

if they differ, are marked by the insertion of a comma-dash “,—”, as listed under the List of Symbols. Since literalness versus idiomaticness is not a question of either-or, but a matter of degree, this sign can be used in succession, as in 这儿的人太多. *Jell de ren tay duo*. ‘This place’s people too many,—The people here are too many,—There are too many people here.’ In general only one point will be important in any given context, so that successive use of this sign is rarely necessary. Thus, if the point under discussion is the substantive nature of place words, then use the form ‘this place’s people,—the people here’ while if it is about the predicative function of adjectives, then use the form ‘...too many,—...are too many’; in any case, the picture should not be blurred by adding unnecessary literal translations which do not illustrate the point being discussed.

(2) Principle of Immediate Semantic Constituents. In glossing a construction with more than one morpheme, the structural constituents should be glossed *at the stage at which they enter the construction* and not at a prior stage. For example, a literal glossing of 面生 *miann-sheng* should be ‘face-unfamiliar’ and not ‘face-raw’, since at the stage at which *sheng* enters the compound it has already gone beyond the meaning of ‘raw’.

(3) Popular¹ or Correct Etymology? Since we are taking the language of the average educated person’s speech as the subject of our study and not that of the classical scholar, we shall follow the popular etymology in analyzing compounds, even though it is known to be wrong by the scholar. For example, the compound 良心 *liang.shin* ‘conscience’ is popularly understood as the ‘good heart’, although in fact *liang* originally meant ‘inborn’ and ‘conscience’ was called *liang-shin* on the theory of man’s nature being born good. Again, ‘snake’ is called 長虫 *charng.chorng* because *chorng* originally meant any animal. (Cf. the form 大虫 *dah-*

¹A distinction is sometimes made between (1) popular etymology, or a popular interpretation of an etymology, and (2) folk etymology, by which a form is altered to make it meaningful. Thus 耳朵 *eel-duoo* ‘ear-blossom,—ear’, is changed, through metathesis, to *eel.dou*, which makes no sense, and then to 耳头 *eel.tou*, in analogy with 舌头 *sher.tou*, with *-tou* taken as a suffix by folk etymology. See also p. 176 on descriptive etymology.

chorng 'tiger', used in old novels.) But now that *chorng* means only 'insect', *charng.chorng* is understood, at the descriptive level, as 'long insect,—snake'.

(4) Simplified Glossing. The relation between morphemes of different languages are more often that of n-to-n than 1-to-1. For example, the one morpheme 牛 *niou* corresponds to English 'ox', 'bull', 'cow', 'cattle', while to English 'cousin' there are 堂兄 *tarngshiong* or 堂房哥 \succ *tarngfarng ge.ge* 'elder cousin on father's side', 堂弟 *tarngdih* or 堂房弟 \succ *tarngfarng dih.dih* 'younger cousin on father's side' and numerous other forms according to age or sex, whether on father's or mother's side, whether as direct address or as a designative term. Since in most cases the disparity of semantic categories does not affect the grammatical analysis, we shall, except where the distinctions happen to be grammatically relevant, adopt simplified glosses, of which the following are some of the most common examples:

	Chinese Form	Simplified Gloss	Strictly
人	<i>ren</i>	man, people	man, woman, person, people, etc.
二位	<i>ell-wey</i>	you two gentle-men	you two gentlemen, you two ladies, you sir and you lady
哥 \succ	<i>ge.ge</i>	brother	older brother, older male cousin
姐 \succ	<i>jiee.jiee</i>	sister	older sister, older female cousin
叔 \succ	<i>shu.shu</i>	uncle	uncle on father's side younger than father
筆	<i>bii</i>	pen	pen, pencil, brush
诗	<i>shy</i>	poetry, poem	poetry, poem of equal length of lines
牛	<i>niou</i>	ox	ox, bull, cow, cattle

桌子	<i>juotz</i>	table	table, desk
江	<i>jiang</i>	river	the Yangtze River; large river
河	<i>her</i>	river	the Yellow River; river
打牌	<i>daa-pair</i>	plays mahjong	plays mahjong, dom- inoes, or cards.
下棋	<i>shiah-chyi</i>	plays chess	plays chess or go
酒	<i>jeou</i>	wine	wine, liquor

Verbs will be glossed in the infinitive form, without 'to', for example, 去 *chiuh* 'go', except in case of ambiguity, for example, 种 *jong* 'to plant'.

(5) Style. Other things being equal, an attempt will be made to make the glosses comparable in style with the forms glossed, for example, 真糟糕! *Jen tzaugau!* 'What a mess!' but 真是不幸! *Jensh bushing!* 'How unfortunate!' but not vice versa. Comparability in style, however, is not as important as comparability in structure, which is after all our chief concern here.

3. List of Symbols

(1) Special Punctuation Marks

- A > B A changed into B historically: 心 *sim* > *shin*.
 A < B A is derived from B historically: 心 *shin* < *sim*.
 A → B A changes into B synchronically: 今日 *jinryh* → 今儿 *jiel*.
 A ← B A is derived from B synchronically: 今儿 *jiel* ← 今日 *jinryh*.
 'A,—B' Literally A, idiomatically B: 再見 *tzayjiann* 'see (you) again,—goodbye'.
 A— Drawl on last sound or sounds: 我想 — *Woo sheang*—, with *a* and *ng* prolonged. (May also indicate the usual functions of dashes.)
 A ~ B A alternates with B: 扔 *rheng* ~ *reeng*.
 °A The form °A does not occur: °第兩 °*dihleang* for 'second'.
 A°, A° See section (3) below.

A B C Coordinate items which are grammatically separate but usually spoken without pause, as 風花雪月 *feng hua sheue yueh* 'winds, flowers, snow, the moon'.

.A A is in the neutral tone. (For convenient identification of morphemes the etymological tone is still indicated in the spelling: 服侍 *fwu.shyh* (instead of *fwu.shy*) 'waits on'.

oA Optional neutral tone in A: 不知道 *bujy_odaw* 'don't know'.

○ Item zero.

□ Character does not exist, or exists but need not be specified.

[] Symbols enclosed are phonetic.

/ / Symbols enclosed are phonemic.

{ } Symbols enclosed are morphophonemic.

, or An 'or' preceded by a comma is synonymous with 'i.e.', as in '2 + 1, or 3', but an 'or' unpreceded by a comma joins real alternatives, as in '3 or 4'.

A hyphen is used between highly versatile elements of compounds, and in A-N or V-O constructions, where A and N or V and O are both monosyllabic, whether free or bound, except that a pronoun object is written without a hyphen.

(a) An apostrophe separates a syllabic ending from a following bound syllable beginning with a vowel: 兴安 *Shing'an* 'Hing An (Mountains)' vs. 心肝 *shingan* 'heart and liver,—darling'.

(b) Entering tone: —ie' Wu dialects, where an Entering Tone ends in a glottal stop if final and is simply very short when followed by another syllable.

(2) Phonetic Symbols

(a) IPA. The forms of IPA used here follow those in the back page of issues of *Le Maître Phonétique*, for example, that of no. 124, 3rd ser., 1965. American usage differs slightly from that of IPA in using *y* for [j], *ü* for [y], and single letters for affricates: *c* for [ts], and *š* for [ʃ], and in using □ for syllabicity: *m̩* for IPA [m̩], whereas [m̥] in IPA means voiceless [m].

(b) Additional Symbols. For the purposes of the present book, we shall add the following symbols:

- [ɿ] Dental apical vowel, as in 丝 *sy* [sɿ] (= [sz] of IPA).
 [ʅ] Retroflex apical vowel, as in 诗 *shy* [ʂʅ] (= [ʂz] or [ʂʒ] of IPA).
 [A] Medium *a*, between front [a] and back [ɑ].
 [E] Medium *e*, between [e] and [ɛ].

The first two were adapted from Karlgren's notation (*Phonologie* 295, Ch tr 197), the third is from Jespersen², and the last one was my proposal.³ For convenience of printing, Greek gamma, chi, and other letters are given without serifs, which are supposed to be attached to free ends of most of the IPA letters.

Occasional citations of dialectal forms will be mainly in IPA, except that Cantonese will be in the system used in *Cant Prim* and the Wu dialects will mainly follow the forms used in my *Studies in the Modern Wu Dialects*, (Peking, 1928).

(c) Modifiers and Glides. We shall set up a rule that a superscribed letter will be an additive glide and a subscribed letter will be an adjectival modifier. For example [aⁿ] means [a] followed by an incompletely formed [n], or by [ã], while [a_n] is taken as [a] nasalized throughout its duration, synonymous with [ã]. Similarly [ə_r] = [ər], but [ə^r] = [ər] or [ə̃r].

(3) Prosodic Elements

(a) Stress. Stress will be marked thus:

- | | |
|---|----------------------|
| □ | normal stress |
| □ | secondary stress |
| □ | tertiary stress |
| □ | contrastive stress |
| □ | weak, or zero stress |

As to what stresses are distinctive, see the section on Phonology (sec. 1.3.6).

(b) Tone Marks. Besides the tonal spelling in GR (see table inside back cover) tones in general are expressed by a set of tone letters consisting of time-pitch graphs attached to the left of a vertical reference line divided into four intervals by five points. These can be used for any dialect. For Mandarin they are as shown in the table on this page. A neutral tone (at various

²Otto Jespersen, *Lehrbuch der Phonetik*, Leipzig, 1904, p. 157.

³"E" for Middle e, *Le Maître Phonétique*, no. 46, 23-24 (1931).

heights) is indicated by a dot, as in 他的 *ta.de* ㄊㄞˊ . ㄉㄝˊ .

Tone Letter	Code	Tone
ㄚ	55:	1st Tone
ㄛ	35:	2nd Tone
ㄜ	214:	3rd Tone
ㄝ	51:	4th Tone
ㄞ	21:	$\frac{1}{2}$ 3rd Tone

Alternatively the same graphs, without a vertical reference line, can be used over letters or characters,⁴ as in 陰, 陽, 上, 去.

(c) Tone Classes. When only class membership is to be indicated, regardless of actual tone values, Mandarin tones are to be indicated by superscribed figures, as in the Wade system, for example, 衣¹, 移², 以³, 意⁴; the traditional tone classes by semicircles, for example, 平, 上, 去, 入; and subdivisions of these classes according to (ancient) voicing, indicated thus: 研^平, 賞^養, 去^去, 具^滯, 十². Semicircles solidly attached to the characters, however, are to be regarded as part of variant characters, usually with more than mere difference in tone: 重 *jonq*; 重 *chorng*, 長 *charng*; 長 *jaang*. The semicircles, whether attached or detached, are not used for tonal distinctions of limited geographical and/or historical validity; for example, 雌 *tsyr* < *ts'ie* is not to be marked as 雌², but as 雌² or 雌². In particular, a new value of the Entering Tone, from redistribution over one of the other tones, is not to be marked with a semicircle. For example, 鉄 *tiee* < *t'iet* is not to be marked as 鉄³, but as 鉄³ or 鉄³.

⁴I proposed these time-pitch graphs to be used in connection with the National Phonetic Letters, as for example in my 新國語當声片課本, 甲種 (Textbook for New Records of the National Language, Version Jea), Shanghai, 1935, which were later adopted by George Kennedy into the Yale System of romanization. Such time-pitch graphs differ in principle from, and are preferable to, the type of tone signs in which acute “´” means high, grave “`” means low, “˘” means falling and “˙” means rising, such as used in the BEFEO system of romanization. This latter type is mathematically more sophisticated, since it represents the first derivative, or *rate of change* of pitch in time rather than pitch simply, and is therefore not as easily imaginable, or *anschaulich*, as the time-pitch type of graphs.

Tone-class spelling follows the GR system (pp. 29-34) and goes by analogy with the GR system for the dialects, except that for Cantonese a doubled vowel means a long vowel, -x and -g (= -ng) indicate Rising Tone, and -q (= -ng) indicates Going Tone.

The *pinn'iam*, or changed tones, of Cantonese are shown by □° for the high tone (phonetically [55:]) and □° for the other tones (phonetically [25:]).

4. Abbreviated Characters. Following is a partial list of abbreviated characters used in the citations in this book. They do not include those common simplified characters which are either better known among students of Chinese than the full characters such as 弓 for 櫛 *shuan* 'bolt' and 針 for 鍼 *jen* 'needle', or equally well known, such as 宝 for 寶 *bao* 'treasure' and 双 for 雙 *shuang* 'double'. Most of the abbreviated characters used in the book are found in 刘復, 李家瑞, 宋元以来俗字谱 (Liou Fuh and Lii Jiaruey, *Song Yuan Yilai Swutzyh Puu*, Shanghai: Academia Sinica, 1930). Of the newest abbreviations, such as those listed in Ronald Hsia and Peter Penn, *Dictionary of Simplified Chinese*, Hong Kong, 1959, relatively few are used here, since they are not so well known and it is not one of the purposes of this book on spoken Chinese to teach such characters in order to facilitate the reading of current publications.⁵ Characters are included in citations, as noted above, primarily for the convenience of those who can follow the examples more comfortably in characters than in transcription. The abbreviated characters listed below are in the order of their *apparent* radicals and residual strokes. Those which have no clear apparent radicals are grouped at the end of the list in the order of total numbers of strokes. When a character is followed by "etc." the simplified form is applicable analogously to other characters of which it forms a part; for example, "勁 = 勁, etc." means also 徑 = 徑, even though the latter case is not listed.

⁵For an objective discussion of the problems of abbreviated characters, see 周法高, 中國语文論叢 (Fa-Kao Chou, *Essays on Chinese Language and Writing*), Taipei, 1963, pp. 169-179.