Mandarin Chinese Words and Parts of Speech

A Corpus-based Study

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12   C: Conjunction

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12 C: Conjunction

Conjunctions are used mainly to connect two or more linguistic units, which then form a larger unit. A conjunction may connect two parallel phrases in a simple sentence. However, most conjunctions work beyond the scope of a simple sentence. They are important grammatical markers in complex sentences that signify the relationship between two clauses.

Conjunctions can be classified according to their scopes and the functions they serve in the sentence. The first type is juxtaposing conjunctions which juxtapose parallel words or phrases. The second type is correlative conjunctions (關聯連接詞), which signal clausal relations.

12.1 Ca: Juxtaposing Conjunctions

In a simple sentence, a juxtaposing conjunction connects two conceptually similar components, and an endocentric structure (i.e. the grammatical category of the larger unit is the same as that of each component) is formed. As a consequence, juxtaposing conjunctions are treated as phrasal heads, and the grammatical category of a phrase headed by a juxtaposing phrase is unspecified (i.e. XP) and will be determined by the grammatical category of the components being connected.

12.1.1 Subcategories

According to whether the second component can be omitted, juxtaposing conjunctions can be further divided into two subcategories: coordinating conjunctions (e.g. 和 han4, 跟 gen1, 或者 huo4zhe3) and listing conjunctions (列舉連接詞) (e.g. 等 deng3, 等等 deng3deng3, 之類 zhi1lei4).

A Coordinated Conjunctions (Caa): Coordinating conjunctions connect two phrases that belong to the same grammatical category, are semantically similar, and neither component can be omitted. Semantically speaking, coordinating conjunctions can join items, offer alternatives, or specify a range. The following are some examples.

- Joining items 和 han4, 跟 gen1, 與 yu3, 同 tong2, 暨 ji4, 及 ji2, 又 you4, 而 er2, 且 qie3, 而又 er2you4.
- Offering alternatives 或 huo4, 或者 huo4zhe3, 還是 hai2shi4, 或是 huo4shi4.
- Specifying a range only 至 zhi4 and 到 dao4.

Generally speaking, coordinating conjunctions usually connect nominals, as shown in (318) and (319).

(318)　讀者　　　與　　作品　　　產生　　　　共鳴
　　　　du2zhe3　yu3　zuo4pin3　chan3sheng1　gong4ming2
　　　　reader and work produce resonance
　　　　'The reader identifies with the work.'

(319)　王　　老　　先生　　　　在　　園子　　裡　　種
　　　　wang2　lao3　xian1sheng1　zai4　yuan2zi0　li3　zhong4
　　　　了　西瓜　　和　　　胡瓜
　　　　le0　xi1gua1　han4　hu2gua1
　　　　Wang old man at garden in plant ASPECT watermelon and cucumber
　　　　'Old Mr. Wang planted watermelons and cucumbers in his garden.'

Coordinating conjunctions that specify a range are even more restricted in terms of items being connected. Usually, they connect definite numerals and determinative-measure compounds (e.g. 三個人 san3 ge0 ren2 'three C person'). The following is an example.

(320)　這　　本　　讀物　　　適合　　三　　到　　四　　歲　　的
　　　　zhe4　ben3　du2wu4　shi4he2　san1　dao4　si4　sui4　de0
　　　　幼童
　　　　you4tong2
　　　　this CLASSIFIER reading.material suitable three to four age DE kid
　　　　'This reading material is suitable for three- to four-year-old kids.'

Sometimes coordinating conjunctions also connect Non-Predicative adjectives, locative phrases, prepositional phrases, verbs, or even clauses, where parallel structures are formed accordingly. Some examples are as follows.

(321)　(Non-Predicative adjectives)

　　　　主要　　　和　　次要　　　的　　條件
　　　　zhu3yao4　han4　ci4yao4　de0　tiao2jian4
　　　　相輔相成
　　　　xiang1fu3xiang1cheng2

　　　　primary and secondary DE condition complement.each.other
　　　　'Primary and secondary conditions complement each other.'

(322) (locative phrases)

椅子　　上　　　和　　桌子　　　上　　　都　　有
yi3zi0　shang4　han4　zhuo1zi0　shang4　dou1　you3
螞蟻　　　在　　爬
ma3yi3　zai4　pa2

chair on and desk on all have ant ASPECT crawl
'There are ants crawling both on the chair and on the desk.'

(323) (prepositional phrases)

你　　可以　　從　　　北站　　　或　　從　　西站
ni3　ke3yi3　cong2　bei3zhan4　huo4　cong2　xi1zhan4
出發
chu1fa1

you can from north station or west station depart
'You can depart from the north station or from the west station.'

(324) (verbs)

技術人員　　　　每　　個　　月　　定期　　　維修
ji4shu4ren2yuan2　mei3　ge0　yue4　ding4qi2　wei2xiu1
及　　保養
ji2　bao3yang3

mechanic each CL month regularly repair and maintain
'The mechanics regularly repair and maintain (something) every month.'

(325) (clauses)

你　　來　　或　　他　　來　　都　　會　　化解
ni3　lai2　huo4　ta4　lai2　dou1　hui4　hua4jie3
紛爭
fen1zheng1

you come or he come all will settle dispute
'Whether you come or he comes, the dispute will be settled.'

The three coordinating conjunctions 又 you4, 而 er2, 且 qie3, 而又 er2you4 are special cases in that they can connect only intransitive stative verbs, as shown in (326) and (327).

(326)　今晚　　　的　　月亮　　　大　　又　　圓
　　　jin1wan3　de0　yue4liang4　da4　you4　yuan2
　　　tonight DE moon large and round
　　　'The moon is large and round tonight.'

(327) 他   的   話   淺顯   且   明白
      ta1 de0 hua4 qian3xian3 qie3 ming2bai2
      He DE word plain and clear
      'His words are plain and clear.'

Depending on the components being connected and their positions, the larger unit can assume many grammatical roles, such as the verb of a sentence (e.g. (324), (326), (327)), the subject (e.g. (318), (325)), the object (e.g. (319)), the adverbial (e.g. (323), (324)), or the attributive (e.g. (320), (321)).

B Enumerated Conjunctions (Cab): There are only three enumerated conjunctions, (i.e. 等 deng3, 等等 deng3deng3, and 之類 zhi1lei4). They are used to connect conceptually similar components. The first component is mostly nominal, but it can also be verbal. The second component must be a noun phrase and can be omitted at the end of a sentence.

When both components are noun phrases, both must be in the same semantic field. The second component can be seen as the hypernym of the first component. Here is an example.

(328) 請   攜帶   身分証,   駕照   等
      qing3 xi1dai4 shen1fen4zheng4, jia4zhao4 deng3
      證件
      zheng4jian4
      please bring ID card driver's license identification
      'Please bring identification such as an ID card, driver's license, etc.'

When the first component is verbal, the second component usually refers to an event. Here is an example:

(329) 他   的   嗜好   是   郊遊,   爬山
      ta1 de0 shi4hao4 shi4 jiao1you2, pa2shan1
      等等   戶外   的   活動
      deng3deng3 hu4wai4 de0 huo2dong4
      he DE hobby be hiking mountain.climbing etc. outdoor DE activity
      'His hobbies are outdoor activities such as hiking, mountain climbing, etc.'

In (329), 等等 deng3deng3 connects verbal elements to a noun phrase, and the whole phrase is still a noun phrase. Consider the following sentence:

(330) 他   的   嗜好   是   郊遊,   爬山
      ta1 de0 shi4hao4 shi4 jiao1you2, pa2shan1
      等等
      deng3deng3
      he DE hobby be hiking mountain.climbing etc
      'His hobbies are hiking, mountain climbing, etc.'

In (330), the second component is omitted. In such cases, the grammatical category of the whole phrase is determined by that of the first component. That is, the phrase jiao1you2, pa2shan1 deng3deng3 'go hiking, go mountain climbing, etc.,' is treated as a verb phrase.

12.1.2 Principles of Analysis

A The four words 和 han4, 跟 gen1, 與 yu3, and 同 tong2 can function as coordinating conjunctions or prepositions. When they serve as coordinating conjunctions, the components being connected are parallel and close to the conjunction. If any element occurs between the two components, then the four words are treated as prepositions. Here is an example, in which 和 han4 is regarded as a preposition.

(331)　他　　昨天　　　和　　我　　碰面
　　　　ta1　zuo2tian1　han4　wo3　peng4mian4
　　　　he yesterday with I meet
　　　　'He had a meeting with me yesterday.'

Sometimes the argument structure of the verb helps to clarify the grammatical function of the four words. For instance, quasi-one-argument verbs take 跟 gen1 or 和 han4 to introduce the object, as shown in the following example:

(332)　他　跟　我　　開玩笑
　　　　ta1　gen　wo3　kai1wan2xiao4
　　　　he with I joke
　　　　'He joked with me.'

In such cases, 跟 gen1 and 和 han4 are regarded as prepositions. Although the distinction between coordinating conjunctions and prepositions appears to be obvious, there are some ambiguous cases. The following is an example where 跟 gen1 can be treated as a coordinating conjunction or a preposition.

(333)　他　跟　　我　　上　　　臺北
　　　　ta1　gen1　wo3　shang4　tai2bei3
　　　　he with I go.to Taipei
　　　　'He went to Taipei with me.'

B In 國語的詞類分析修訂版, 等 deng3 and 等等 deng3deng3 are treated as particles. We treat them as coordinating conjunctions for two reasons: First, they do not always occur in the sentence-final position; second, they serve the function of connecting parallel phrases.

12.2 Cb: Correlative Conjunctions

The function of a correlative conjunction is to combine two clauses into a longer sentence, which then works on sentential levels. A correlative conjunction can occur in the first clause or in the second clause, and it often occurs before the verb. More often than not, a correlative conjunction in one clause is paired with another correlative conjunction or adverb in another clause. According to the status of the two clauses being connected, sentences are divided into two categories: compound sentences (聯合句) and complex sentences (偏正句). In a compound sentence like (334), the two clauses have equal status. In a complex sentence like (335), the two clauses do not have equal status: The main clause is elaborated by the subordinate clause.

(334) 他   不但   跑   很   快,   而且   跳   很
       ta1   bu2dan4   pao3   hen3   kuai4,   er2qie3   tiao4   hen3
      高。(compound   sentences)
      gao1
      he not.only run very fast but.also jump very high
      'He not only runs fast but also jumps high.'

(335) 只要   太陽   一   出來,   雪人   馬上
      zhi3yao4   tai4yang2   yi4   chu1lai2,   xue3ren2   ma3shang4
      不見。(complex   sentences)
      bu2jian4
      as.long.as sun once come.out snowman immediately disappear
      'As soon as the sun comes out, the snowmen will disappear immediately.'

Between the two clauses of a compound sentence, there are three relations: (i) relation of option, (ii) relation of gradation, and (iii) relation of coordination. Between the two clauses of a complex sentence, there are six relations: (i) relation of transition or concession, (ii) relation of cause and effect, (iii) relation of hypothetical conditions, (iv) relation of conditions, (v) relation of choice, and (vi) relation of purpose. Due to the westernization of Chinese, sometimes the subordinate clause can be preceded by the main clause. For example, the sentence in (336) can be rephrased as:

(336) 雪人   馬上   不見,   只要   太陽   一
      xue3ren2   ma3shang4   bu2jian4,   zhi3yao4   tai4yang2   yi4
      出來
      chu1lai2
      snowman immediately disappear as.long.as sun once come.out
      'The snowmen will disappear immediately as soon as the sun comes out.'

12.2.1 Subcategories

According to the position of the conjunction and the mobility of the clause where the conjunction occurs, correlative conjunctions are divided into three subcategories:

(i)   Movable forward linking conjunctions: These conjunctions introduce a clause and frame the preposition that is expressed in that clause. The clause where a movable forward linking conjunction occurs can be moved to the latter part of the complex sentence. These conjunctions can be further divided into two types.

Cbaa   movable conjunctions in complex sentences (e.g. 雖然 sui1ran2 'although', 因為 yin1wei4 'because', 即使 ji2shi3 'even though', 只有 zhi3you3 'only if', 只要 zhi3yao4 'as long as')
Cbab   sentence-final conjunctions in complex sentences (i.e. only 的話 de0hua4 'if', 起見 qi3jian3 'in order that')

(ii)   Nonmovable forward linking conjunctions: These conjunctions introduce a clause and frame the preposition that is expressed in that clause. The clause where a nonmovable forward linking conjunction occurs is always the first clause. These conjunctions can be further divided into two types.

Cbba   nonmovable forward linking conjunctions in complex sentences (e.g. 雖 sui1 'although', 既 ji4 'since', 就是 jiu4shi4 'just')
Cbbb   forward linking conjunctions in compound sentences (e.g. 不但 bu2dan4 'not only', 一來 yi4lai2 'for one thing')

(iii) Backward linking conjunctions: These conjunctions link a clause to its preceding clause, and they almost always occur at the very beginning of the second clause. They can be further divided into two types.

Cbca   backward linking conjunctions in complex sentences (e.g. 可是 ke3shi4 'but', 所以 suo3yi3 'so', 那麼 na4me0 'then', 否則 fou3ze2 'otherwise')
Cbcb   backward linking conjunctions in compound sentences (e.g. 而且 er2qie3 'and', 二來 er4lai2 'for another')