



# ***Section 3***



# *Syntactic Features*

- Hypotactic vs Paratactic
- Particular vs. General
- Topic – comment structure
- Disjunctive questions
- Negation
- Zero structure for clarification
- Complete structures in responses



## *Hypotactic vs Paratactic(1)*

English is **hypotactic** in that the basic structure of a sentence is subject and verb, and that all the other elements are added on via connectives. In other words, form is needed to convey meaning. The structure of English can be compared to **a tree**.



## *Hypotactic vs Paratactic (2)*

Chinese is **paratactic** in that it has no inflections and does not need connectives for sentence organization. The meanings of different parts help indicate the relationship within a sentence. The structure of Chinese can be compared to **a bamboo**.



## *Hypotactic vs Paratactic (3)*

*An example:*

*The boy, who was crying as if his heart would break, said, when I spoke to him, that he was very hungry, because he had had no food for two days.*

(Lin Dajin, cited in Lin Luzhu, 2000)



## *Hypotactic vs Paratactic (4)*

Translation of the example:

That boy was crying as if his heart would break, when I spoke to him, he said he had had no food for two days, was very hungry.

(Lin Luzhu, 2000)



## *Particular vs. General*

Chinese follow a particular-general pattern:

cause – effect

chronological order

big – small

As a result, Chinese does not rely on verbs, but on word order and auxiliaries for sentence construction.



## *Particular vs. General (2)*

English follows a general – particular pattern:

general – specific

attitude – description

topic – example

whole – details

effect – cause

small – big

So English relies on subject-verb structure.

(Lian Yanhua, 2000)

(Li Wanwen & Lou Chengying, 2001)



## *Particular vs. General (3)*

I believe(1) that I speak for every sincere and serious representative in the United States(2) – So I am encouraged to believe by the speeches to which we have already listened this morning(3) – When I say (4) that the anniversary must be an occasion for an honest assessment of our failures(5) in the past, matched by and equally determined will to do better in the future(6), so that we can escape from frustration(7) and turn the anniversary into an inspiration and an achievement(8).

Chinese order: 5-6-7-8-4-1-3-2

(Lian Yanhua, 2000)



## *Comparison of sequence in English and Chinese*

The sequence of English:

from small to big, from near to far

The sequence of Chinese:

from far to near, from big to small

I was born in Quanzhou, Fujian, China on Nov. 3, 1980.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

我1980年 11月3日出生于中国 福建 泉州.

(5) (4) (3) (2) (1)

(Lin Luzhu, 2000)



## *Topic – Comment Structure:*

According to an eminent linguist Yuen Ren Chao, Chinese follows a topic – comment structure. The topic is what is already known while the comment is new information. In other words, Chinese learners tend to put their opinion at the end of the talk.

This is confusing to a native speaker who usually expects to hear the conclusion first.



## *Topic – Comment Structure: an example*

American: How does the Nutritional Institute decide what topics to study? How do you decide what topic to do research on?

Chinese: Because, now, period get change. It's different from past time. In past time, we emphasized how to solve practical problems. Nutrition must know how to solve some deficiency diseases. Such as x, y, z. But, now it is important that we must do some basic research. *So, We must take into account fundamental problems. We must concentrate our research to study some fundamental problems.*

(Linda Wai Ling Young, cited in Lin Luzhu, 2000)



## *Disjunctive questions*

- English way of interrogating and responding:

Question: +, - or -, +

Answer: +, + or -, -

- Chinese way of responding:

Positive: -, +

Negative: +, -



## *Disjunctive questions – an example*

### ■ English:

You don't like the book, do you?

— Yes, I do.

— No, I don't.

### ■ Chinese:

— No, I like it. (positive answer)

— Yes, I don't like it. (Negative answer)



## *Negation (1)*

❖ The structure of “all ... not ...”

*“They all don’t like cheese.”*

English: “Some people like cheese, others don’t.”

Chinese: “Nobody likes cheese.”



## Negation (2)

❖ The structure of “cannot ... too ...”

*“I can't be too careful.”*

English: “It's never too much to be very careful.”

Chinese: “One shouldn't be very careful.”



## *Negation (3)*

❖ The structure of “cannot ... enough ...”

*“I can’t thank you enough.”*

English: “Thank you very much.”

Chinese: “I should only thank you a little.”

(Albert Weizu Zhang, 1993)



## *Zero structure for clarification*

Chinese learners are weak in asking for and making clarifications. When they hear a new word, instead of asking:

*What do you mean by ...? / What's ...?*

They will probably utter:

*“um, uh”*

and have a puzzled look, leaving a native speaker to wonder whether it is just a language barrier or there is something wrong.



## *Zero structure for clarification (2)*

Likewise, when Chinese speakers use a word not understood by a native, they might fail to explain the term and look embarrassed, thinking they have failed to get the message across.

*In such a situation a native would simply choose a synonym or paraphrase the term.*

Chinese learners do not often realize that both parties should be involved in meaning negotiation.



## *Complete structures in responses*

Many Chinese learners have been taught to use complete structures in their responses. But this habit often confuses or even irritates native speakers.

*English: Have you finished your work?*

*Chinese: Yes, I have finished the work.*

To a native the answer might sound like:

*“Why are you asking me that? Can’t you see it yourself?”*



## *Summary*

- ❖ Some phonological features of Chinese learners are the causes of misunderstanding among native speakers and Chinese interlocutors.
- ❖ Some words are used inappropriately by Chinese learners without realizing the connotative differences.
- ❖ Some syntactic features may also give rise to difficulties in communication.



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*The End*