

Lesson 6

Pivot Verbs, Auxiliary Verbs, and Classical Commentary

Pivot Verbs

In English, asking, urging, or ordering someone to do an action has two basic forms. We can say either:

1. I asked that he give you this.

or, more commonly:

2. I asked him to give you this.

In (1), the request (“he give you this”) is a form of indirect discourse, a reporting of speech at secondhand, but because the quoted speech is a request, the verb is in the subjunctive mood. In (2), the *subject* in the quoted speech who is to perform the requested action (“he give you this”) has become the *indirect object* (“him”) of the verb “ask.” This change is called “subject raising.”

Asking, urging, ordering, and—more abstractly—causing in literary Chinese also use subject raising; the person who is to perform the requested action appears in the sentence as the indirect object of the request:

3. 亞父勸項羽擊沛公 Yǎfù urged Xiàng Yǔ to strike the Lord of Pèi.
4. 五色令人目盲 The five colors cause people's eyes to go blind.
5. 使之聞之 [Confucius] caused [the messenger] to hear it.

Sentences 3–5 all use a *pivotal construction*, where the pivots are 項羽, 人目, and 之, respectively. That is, Xiàng Yǔ is both the person being urged and the person who is to strike. The eyes in (4) are what are affected by the colors, and they are what goes blind; and in (5), Confucius is subjecting the messenger to an action, the action of hearing him (play his zither). It is particularly clear in Sentence (5) that the pivot is the *indirect object* of the pivot verb because 之 can be used only as an object, and not as a topic or modifier. Moreover, since the pivot is the indirect object, the action to be performed by the pivot is the *direct object* of the pivot verb.

Many verbs can be used in pivotal constructions, but a few—like 使, 令, and 勸—almost always appear in pivotal constructions and thus this textbook refers to them as pivot verbs.¹

Auxiliary Verbs

In literary Chinese an auxiliary verb changes the sense of the main verb in terms of its possibility, probability, or desirability. The most important auxiliary verbs are:

- 能 *néng*, able to ...
- 可 *kě*, can be ...
- 可以 *kěyǐ*, can ...
- 必 *bì*, must ...
- 應 *yīng*, ought to ...
- 肯 *kěnn*, willing to ...
- 敢 *gǎn*, dare to ...
- 難 *nán*, hard to ... > impossible to ...

1. See Yáng Bójùn 楊伯峻 and Hé Lèshì 何樂士, *Gǔ Hànyǔ yǔfǎ jí qí fāzhǎn* 古漢語語法及其發展 (Beijing; Yuwen, 1992), pp. 589–616, for an exhaustive analysis.

An auxiliary verb requires a main verb as its *object*. Like many transitive verbs, however, an auxiliary verb's object may be omitted if it is obvious and therefore considered unnecessary. The main verb may be *implicit*. That is, the reader can infer from context what the elided main verb must be.

Although an auxiliary is like a pivot verb in taking a main verb as its object, unlike a pivot verb, an auxiliary *cannot* be followed immediately by an indirect object preceding the main verb:

*肯之去 [~~She~~] is willing that he leave.

This sort of intention must be expressed in other ways, perhaps most simply as a auxiliary with a pivot construction: 肯令之去.

Commentaries

Most texts written in literary Chinese do not have glossaries, or even punctuation. And few have been translated into a modern language. But occasionally texts do have commentaries, fortunately for us. A commentary may tell the referent of a particular expression, the historical context of the text, or the pronunciation of a word. It often provides paraphrases of especially difficult passages, as well as stylistic analyses of the organization of the text and at least one opinion about the quality of argumentation and writing in the text. Moreover, the commentator's choices of what to gloss indicates his (in premodern China, commentators were male) perceptions of the passages that readers are likely to find problematic. The very fact of a gloss can be reassuring; it is a sign that the modern reader is not alone, that for centuries Chinese readers have struggled over the same passage. However, there is an art to reading commentary. Commentaries have a specialized vocabulary of technical terms and particular stylistic qualities.

Some important terms used to explain the meaning of a phrase are:

猶 *yóu*, "to resemble" > [the meaning] is similar to . . .

貌 *mào*, "appearance" > [the phrase] is descriptive of . . .

借字 "loan character" > [this character] is used for [the homophone] . . .

一作 "one makes" > one [version of this text] has [the character(s)] . . .

On occasion, the editors of a text will indicate that they are offering their own opinion:

案 *àn*, “case” > in the editor’s opinion . . .

The text for this lesson includes a line of commentary as an introduction to the topic.

Text: 楊布(列子)

1. 楊朱之弟曰布。衣素衣而出。

釋文云衣素衣之衣於既切。下衣緇衣同。素衣之衣依字。

2. 天雨，解素衣。衣緇衣而反。

3. 其狗不知，迎而吠之。

4. 楊布怒將扑之。

5. 楊朱曰子無扑矣。子亦猶是也。

6. 嚮者使汝狗白而往，黑而來，豈能無怪哉。

Vocabulary

楊布	Yáng Bù	釋文	<i>Shì wén</i> , short for 經典釋文, written by 陸德明
列子	<i>Liè Zǐ</i> , a text supposedly written by the Daoist philosopher		Lù Dé míng (556–627): an important philological text
楊朱	Yáng Zhū, “hedonist” philosopher	云	<i>yún</i> (v), to say, “open quote”
弟	<i>dī</i> (n), younger brother	於既切	<i>yú jì qiè</i> , a notation of sound: 衣 ?ièi = 於 ?i[ō] + 既 [ki]èi
衣	<i>yī</i> (n), clothes > <i>yì</i> (v), to wear clothes		
素	<i>sù</i> (n), undyed (white) silk	下	<i>xià</i> (n), [the text] below
出	<i>chū</i> (v), to go out	緇	<i>zī</i> (n), black silk
		依	<i>yī</i> (v), to rely on

字	zì (n), written character	猶	yóu (fw > v), to resemble
依字	yī zì, according to the regular meaning	嚮	xiàng (n?), formerly > just now
雨	yǔ (n), rain > yù (v), to rain	使	shǐ (v), to cause > (v) let us suppose . . .
解	jiě (v), to cut, remove	汝	rǔ (n), you [informal]
反	fǎn (v), to return	白	bái (v), to be white
狗	gǒu (n), dog	黑	hēi (v), to be black
知	zhī (v), to know	來	lái (v), to come
迎	yíng (v), to greet, meet	豈	qǐ [rhetorical question: "How . . . ?"]. The implied answer is almost always negative.
吠	fèi (v), to bark at		
怒	nù (v), to be angry		
將	jiāng (adv), about to	怪	guài (v), to consider strange > to blame
扑	pū (v), to beat		
無	wú > don't [an imperative]	哉	zāi [final: exclamation]
ㄉ			

Notes on the Text

1. 釋文云 The 經典釋文 is one of the most important collection of glosses in the Chinese tradition. Lù Démíng in his citations preserves many Southern Dynasties interpretations and commentaries that otherwise would have been lost.
2. 衣素衣之衣 The annotation discusses the reading (and hence the meaning) of the character 衣. This phrase is a way of referring to the *first* 衣, i.e. 衣素衣之衣. In contrast, the simpler, unambiguous phrase 素衣之衣 refers to the *second* 衣 (素衣之衣).
3. 於既切 This form is a *fǎn qiè*, a style of notation used by Chinese scholars since the end of the Hàn dynasty to indicate the pronunciation of a word. In a *fǎn qiè*, one takes the initial of the first word and the final of the second word: the two pieces added together give

the pronunciation of the word being glossed. In this example, the sound ʔiài for the character 衣 is derived as follows:

initial (beginning sound) of 於 ([ʔjiō) = ʔ

final (ending sound) of 既 (k[iài]) = iài

sound of 衣 = ʔiài

There are two common reasons for indicating a pronunciation. (1) The character is obscure, and the annotator thinks that the reader may not know how to read it. (2) For more common characters, the annotation indicates a special reading and a special meaning. *Pay attention to these.* In this case, the commentary notes that 衣 is to be read in the 去聲, that is, as a *verb*.

4. 下...同 This is commentary shorthand meaning that in the “text below” (下), the situation is the “same” (同) as that just described.

5. 子 Here 子 is a status pronoun, the name of a rank or a status within a group, that is used as a pronoun to refer to oneself (first person), to one’s listener (second person), or on occasion to a third person. Here 子, loosely translated as “master” is an informal but still polite form of address.

6. 無扑矣 This is a mildly negative imperative. Although 無 usually means “there is no . . . ,” it also frequently serves as a mildly negative command, “Don’t.” The 矣 at the end of the sentence behaves in ways strikingly similar to 了 in modern Mandarin Chinese. Most frequently it is a sentence final particle that indicates completed action, but it also can point to a change of status or to new information that the recipients might not know and to which they should pay attention.

7. 嚮者 This is a time topic.

8. 使汝狗白而往 This sentence is a pivot construction, and 使 is perhaps the most common of all pivot verbs. 使 expresses the important act of *causation*: one has or lets (causes) someone do something. The person or thing doing the action appears in the sentence as the pivot. Here, Yang Zhu proposes a situation: “Suppose we have your dog go out white and come back black.” 汝狗 is the pivot. As this sentence illustrates, this causative construction with 使 is a standard

way of making a counterfactual proposition. Yang Zhu does not expect this change of color to happen. Indeed, he probably does not even believe it is possible, but he raises this *hypothetical situation* to make his point.

9. 能無怪哉 Here 能 is an auxiliary. The verb that is its object (what we call the “main verb”) is 無. The object of 無 is also a verb—怪 “to consider strange or blame”—that is nominalized: “there is no considering strange/blaming” Yet whereas 無 *can* have verbs as its object, 能 *must* have a verb as its object.

Questions

1. What is the function of 而 in (1)?
2. Is the relation between 雨 and 解 in (2) topic-comment or verb₁-verb₂? Why?
3. Does 知 have a direct object in (3)? If it does, what is it?
4. What is the grammatical function of 怒 in (4)?
5. What is the function of 也 in (5)?
6. What is the direct object of 使 in (6)?
7. What part of speech is 白 in (6)? Why?

Exercises

1. Diagram and translate the following sentences:

a. 農夫不肯耕田

b. 農夫不應待兔之觸株

c. 吾豈敢扑其狗

d. 子能入水而得其矛乎

e. 其言不可疑也

2. For the following 反切, what does the character mean? (You may need to use a dictionary.)

a. 爲喻睡反

b. 使史吏切

c. 應於證反

d. 易羊益切 [This represents a distinction preserved in Cantonese.]