

Lesson 7

Coverbs

In literary Chinese, coverbs play the function served by *prepositions* in English. However, coverbs are *not* prepositions and do not behave in the same way. Coverbs are a type of *transitive verb*. That is, they take objects, can be modified by 所, negated by 不, and marked for coordination by 而. And perhaps most fundamentally, they describe an action. The type of action they describe, however, is an *attendant action*, something done in order to bring about the action of the *main verb*. Although this quality of being the *antecedent condition* for the action of the main verb is a possibility in *all* examples of coordination of verbs, several verbs came regularly to play this subordinate function:

- 從 *cóng*, “to follow”
- 自 *zì*, “to start from”
- 由 *yóu*, “to follow along”
- 與 *yǔ*, “to give to” > “to accompany”
- 因 *yīn*, “to rely on”
- 以 *yǐ*, “to grasp” > “to use”
- 爲 *wèi*, “to act for the sake of”

Because these verbs were used with such frequency in coordinate pairs, they acquired a special function and behavior.

Perhaps the most conspicuous sort of irregularity displayed by coverbs is the way in which 所 constructions are made:

- 以刀殺狗 > 所以殺狗者，刀也。
- 義從貴且富出 > 義之所從出，貴且富也。

or, in general $CV + O_{CV} + MV > 所 + CV + MV, O_{CV}$ 也.

Note the following conventions concerning particular coverbs:

1. The character 因, like all other coverbs, usually takes an object. On occasion, however, 因 by itself *without an object* is used at the beginning of a sentence to mean “relying on the entire situation recounted in the text above”
2. The common construction 以 *X* 爲 *Y*, means “to take *X* to be *Y*.” From this expression grew the compound verb 以 爲, which means “takes [it] to be . . .” > “believes that”
3. There are two major possibilities for the construction

V_1 以 V_2

- a. The two verbs should be taken as $MV + CV + O_{CV}$, where the usual order has been reversed in order to stress that V_2 is the object of the coverb 以: “ V_1 by means of V_2 .” Consider

告之以有過 informed him *with* [the fact of] *his having erred*

- b. The verbs should be taken as V_1 而 V_2 , “ V_1 and, by means of it, V_2 ” That is, 以 often is used to *make clear* the fact that the first verb is the *antecedent condition* for the second. With 而, we cannot know for sure what the fact of coordination implies; 以 removes that doubt, as in

脩身以俟之 cultivate oneself *to await* him

4. 因 and 以 often appear together. Consider:

或因枝以振葉 Some rely on the branch to shake the leaves.

This is essentially equivalent to:

或因枝而振葉

That is, 因 here returns to its fully verbal usage as the first of a pair of coordinate verbs. Note, however, that 以 replaces 而 as a marker of coordination and, as in (3) above, strongly stresses the idea that 因枝 defines the conditions under which the second action (振葉) occurs.

*Once Again:
The Function Word 也 in Verbal Phrases*

In the selection below, 也 appears four times at the end of sentences with verbal comments. The function of this important and difficult structure merits repeated explanation. In all four cases, the function is the same: *to turn an action into a general condition, a state of affairs*. For example:

以爲畏狐也 [He] took [it] to be that [the animals] feared the fox.

What the tiger believed is a *categorical statement, a general proposition*: the animals fear the fox not just this one time but always, and such is simply the way things are.¹ Thus, in an important sense, the sentence remains an *identity statement*, like any other nominal sentence ending in 也. Hence when the fox proclaims:

今子食我，是逆天帝命也。Now for you to eat me would be a violation of the Heavenly Emperor's command.

he says this as a generally valid truth: "Not only is it a violation this one time; it always has been and always will be a violation." The sentence, being categorical, is far stronger than the verbal sentence without the 也.

Text: 狐假虎威 (戰國策)

1. 虎求百獸而食之，得狐。
2. 狐曰子無敢食我也。
3. 天帝使我長百獸，今子食我，是逆天帝命也。
4. 子以我爲不信，吾爲子先行，子隨我後，觀百獸之見我而敢不走乎。

1. Pulleyblank (*Outline of Classical Chinese Grammar*, p. 118) explains this usage as a type of continuative aspect marker.

5. 虎以爲然，故遂與之行，獸見之皆走。
 6. 虎不知獸畏己而走也，以爲畏狐也。

Vocabulary

狐	<i>hú</i> (n), fox	長	<i>zhǎng</i> (v), to grow > (v) be an elder (leader) to
假	<i>jiǎ</i> (v), to borrow	逆	<i>nì</i> (v), to go against
虎	<i>hǔ</i> (n), tiger	命	<i>mìng</i> (n), decree, command
威	<i>wēi</i> (n), majesty, prestige	信	<i>xìn</i> (v), to be trustworthy
戰國策	<i>Zhàn guó cè</i> , <i>Strategies of the Warring States</i> , a quasi-historical collection of stories about Warring States persuaders 遊說者	先	<i>xiān</i> (n), former [part]
求	<i>qiú</i> (v), to seek	隨	<i>suí</i> (v), to follow
百	<i>bǎi</i> , hundred > all types of	後	<i>hòu</i> (n), latter [part]
獸	<i>shòu</i> (n), animal	觀	<i>guān</i> (v), to observe
食	<i>shí</i> (v), to eat	見	<i>jiàn</i> (v), to see
子	<i>zǐ</i> (n), master > you [polite]	故	<i>gù</i> (fw), [for this] reason
敢	<i>gǎn</i> (av), to dare	遂	<i>suì</i> (v), to follow > (adv) accordingly
帝	<i>dì</i> (n), emperor	皆	<i>jiē</i> (adv), in all cases
		畏	<i>wèi</i> (v), to fear
		己	<i>jǐ</i> (n), oneself, third-person reflexive pronoun

Notes on the Text

1. 百獸 The number 百 is used to represent “all of the many” For example, 百姓 “all of the many surnames” (i.e., everyone) and 諸子百家 “the many philosophers [of the Warring States period].”

2. 子無敢食我也 無 can be a mild negative imperative. Here it retains this quality: “You most certainly don’t dare eat me.” Note also the final 也, which makes the sentence a statement of fact. This is a strong assertion that borders on an order.

3. 是逆天帝命也 The character 是 means “this,” but it often is used at the beginning of a comment construction to refer to a much longer topic, or a phrase that needs to be marked off as a topic: “as for what I have just mentioned, it . . .” In such cases, the comment is itself an abbreviated topic (是)–comment (逆天帝命) construction.

4. 吾爲子先行 The problem here is with 爲: is it *fourth* tone, meaning “for your sake” or *second* tone, meaning “I will enact . . .”? The two readings tell the same story about who goes first:

爲[Coverb] 子[Object] + 先[Modifier] 行[Main verb] for your sake, [I’ll] travel in front

爲[Verb] + 子[Modifier] 先[Modifier] 行[Object] enact a “traveling in front of you”

The commentaries seem to agree that it should be in *second* tone, but that the usage here is slightly unusual.

5. 觀百獸之見我而敢不走乎 The object of 觀 is a complex *embedded sentence* (see Lesson 8). Its free, unbound sentence form is:

百獸見我而敢不走乎 The animals see me, and dare they not run away?

That is, the first half of the sentence (百獸見我) is a normal declarative sentence that sets up the conditions for the rhetorical question in the second half (敢不走乎). The sentence is embedded, that is, it *acts like a noun* (here, the direct object of 觀); this is accomplished by placing a 之 between the topic and the comment.

6. 然 Here 然 is a one-word sentence: “[It] is like this.” Moreover, it is a verbal sentence rather than nominal.

7. 與之行 This is a *coverb* construction. That is, in this case 與 does not serve to mark coordination of the two nouns 虎 and 之. First, the 虎 is too far away for this to be simple coordination. Moreover, 與 has a specificity of meaning here. Try substituting 從: the sentence

gives a very different picture of the relationship of the two animals. Now, instead of “traveling with” the fox, the tiger would be “following him.”

8. 虎不知獸畏己也 As this sentence shows, 己 differs from 自 in an important way. 自 is a modifier, and 自畏 would mean “The animals feared *themselves*.” Or “They feared *of their own accord*.” The author says instead that the animals fear the *tiger*. The 己 often is used in situations like this, in which the pronoun refers back to the *speaker* in the framing sentence (in this case, the tiger who 不知) rather than to the actors (獸) of the embedded action.

Questions

1. What is the function of 而 in (1)? What is the relationship between the two actions?
2. What type of object is 百獸 in (3)? Why?
3. What is the grammatical function of 後 in (4)? How can you tell?
4. What is the relationship between 見 and 走在 (5)?
5. What two verbs does 而 connect as coordinate in (6)?
6. What phrase does the first 也 in (6) mark as nominal? What is its function?

Exercises

1. Translate

從其父還家

與其弟還家

自佛寺還家

由其向所往路還家

爲其弟不樂還家

2. Change the following from a 所 construction to a V-O sentence and translate the sentence:

Example: 所從還家者其父也 → 從其父還家

王所以殺民者政也

所與相樂者同心之人也

列子所因而遊者順風也

3. Change the following to a 所 construction and translate the sentence.

Example: 與弟還家 → 所與還家者弟也

以心聽其言外之意

從其事之跡得其情