

Lesson 3

Coordinate Verbs

In literary Chinese, as in any language, one must create sequences of actions if one wants to tell a story or make an argument. In *persuasive* writing, the connections between actions often are hypothetical:

1. If we do not hang together, we shall surely hang separately.

The first action is offered as a possibility whose consequences are to be explored. In literary Chinese, such a sequence of actions therefore takes the form of a **topic-comment** structure.

Narrative description, in contrast, sets out a series of actions that unfold in time. They do not necessarily follow as a logical progression:

2. There were rose bushes in front of the house. I went up the walk. I listened before I pushed the bell.¹

The relationship between the actions can be quite complex. In the small scene above, all the actions occur sequentially. They also can be simultaneous:

3. I sat there and listened to it and thought long careful thoughts. (p. 48)

1. Raymond Chandler, *Farewell, My Lovely* (New York: Vintage, 1976), p. 155. Sentences 3–5 are also from *Farewell, My Lovely*; page numbers cited in parentheses.

The actions can also be a cause followed by its effect:

4. I had nightmares and woke out of them sweating. (p. 161)

or a means followed by its purpose:

5. I got up and locked the doors. (p. 189)

Moreover, a second action can occur despite the first or as a reaction: the list of possible relationships gets quite long.

In literary Chinese the most abbreviated form of a sequence of actions is the use of **coordinate verbs** in the comment of a single sentence. Even this seemingly simple structure, however, retains all the complex possibilities for relationship implicit in parallel action in general. Are the two events of the same sort, or are they opposites? Does the second event occur as the result of the first, or despite it? Do the two actions occur simultaneously or in succession? All these are possible interpretations of verbal parallelism in literary Chinese. Indeed, unlike in English, verb coordination in literary Chinese tends to suggest that the first verb is the **antecedent condition** for the second. That is, the first action strongly influences how the second action occurs or whether it occurs at all.

Literary Chinese can be explicit about the precise nature of the relationship between two actions, but writers usually leave the connections implicit and trust to the reader's acumen. Modern readers therefore must develop the habit of reflecting on how the actions presented in a pair of coordinate verbs relate to one another. Indeed, these implicit relations form an important part of how Chinese authors organized their texts not only at the level of verbs in sentences but also at the level of sequences of actions out of which the larger arguments are built.

Text: 守株待兔(韓非子)

1. 宋人有耕者，田中有株，兔走觸株，折頸而死。
2. 因釋其耒而守株，冀復得兔。
3. 兔不可復得，而身爲宋國笑。
4. 今欲以先王之政治當世之民皆守株之類也。

Vocabulary

守	<i>shǒu</i> (v), to maintain, guard	不	<i>bù</i> (adv), not
株	<i>zhū</i> (n), tree trunk, stump	可	<i>kě</i> (av), can + [verb]
待	<i>dài</i> (v), to await	身	<i>shēn</i> (n), body > one's person
兔	<i>tù</i> (n), rabbit	爲	<i>wéi</i> (v), to enact, become > [passive marker]
宋	<i>Sòng</i> (n), name of a state	國	<i>guó</i> (n), state, kingdom
人	<i>rén</i> (n), person	笑	<i>xiào</i> (v), to laugh
有	<i>yǒu</i> (v), there is	今	<i>jīn</i> (n), now, the present
耕	<i>gēng</i> (v), to plow	欲	<i>yù</i> (v), to desire
者	<i>zhě</i> (n), abstract noun (bound form)	以	<i>yǐ</i> (v), to take > (cv) taking . . .
田	<i>tián</i> (n), cultivated field	先	<i>xiān</i> (n), former part
中	<i>zhōng</i> (n), the middle part	王	<i>wáng</i> (n), king
走	<i>zǒu</i> (v), to run	先王	<i>xiān wáng</i> , the Former Kings (周文王武王, Kings Wén and Wǔ of Zhōu)
觸	<i>chù</i> (v), to knock against	政	<i>zhèng</i> (n), governance
折	<i>zhé</i> (v), to break	治	<i>zhì</i> (v), to govern
頸	<i>jǐng</i> (n), neck	當	<i>dāng</i> (v), to be at > (adj), contemporary
死	<i>sǐ</i> (v), to die	世	<i>shì</i> (n), generation (~30 years)
因	<i>yīn</i> (cv), to rely on > (fw) thereupon	民	<i>mín</i> (n), the populace
釋	<i>shì</i> (v), to release	皆	<i>jiē</i> (adv), in every case
耒	<i>lěi</i> (n), plow	類	<i>lèi</i> (n), category
冀	<i>jì</i> (v), to hope		
復	<i>fù</i> (adv), again		
得	<i>dé</i> (v), to obtain		

Grammar Notes

1. 宋人有耕者，田中有株 Here 有 is the verb of “existential predication”: that is, it says that its object exists. “*There is a plower.*” “*There was a stump.*” When 有 has a **topic**, it usually indicates a *time* or *place*. Here we have “*Among the people of Song there is a plower*” and “*In the field there was a stump.*”
2. 兔走觸株，折頸而死 In both cases, the coordinate verb phrases indicate that the second action occurred *as the result* of the first: “The rabbit ran, *with the result that* [it] hit the stump.” “[It] broke its neck, and *as a result* [it] died. Note that in the second sentence, 而 explicitly indicated the verbal coordination. Since the syntax is rather unambiguous, the character’s function probably is to fill out the *four-count* rhythm that dominates this story and most literary Chinese prose.
3. 因 When 因 takes a *direct object*, it is a **coverb** and means “relying on” Here, however, it appears alone at the beginning of the sentence and takes *the previous sentence* as its assumed object: “relying on [the previous situation], ...”
4. 釋其耒 Note that the last **topic** of the first sentence is the rabbit. Yet it is not the rabbit but the farmer who lets go of the plow. The second sentence, which has **no explicit topic**, does not indicate this change of topic; the author simply assumes that readers are paying attention.
5. 可復得 The construction 可 + **verb** is a **passive** construction, “can be *verbed*.”
6. 而身為 . . . Notice that 而 here marks coordination not of verbs but of complete **verbal sentences**. Larger units—phrases, clauses, sentences—all behave according to the same rules as single characters. The basic rules can be applied to even very long sentences: the art lies in recognizing the “larger units” as verbs, nouns, and other parts of speech.
7. 身為宋國[所]笑 This is another type of **passive** construction: “his person *became* (為) that at which [the people of] the state of Song

laughed.” The character 所 often is used to make the construction clearer. (See Lesson 4.)

8. 今 Here 今 serves as a **time topic**: “Now [under these circumstances]”

9. 以 . . . 治 . . . This sentence is long and complex, but its organization follows simple rules. The first step in analyzing it is to see that 以 and 治 form a **coverb/main verb** pair with their respective objects.

10. 守株之類 Note the use of 之 here to mark **explicit subordination**. We have 類 “a category”: what sort of category? The phrase says a “guard the stump” sort of category. Notice that when the **verb-object** compound is used to modify 類, it effectively becomes nominalized to “[the category of] guarding the stump.”

Questions

1. What are the relationships between the four parts of the first sentence? Is the second a comment on the first, the third a comment on the second, and so on? Are they all coordinate?
2. What about the two parts of the second sentence?
3. What is the topic in the fourth sentence?

Exercises

1. Topic and Comments

Note the various transformations of the sentences below. Translate each in a way that reflects the change in emphasis with the different topics:

a. 宋人耕田。

宋人有耕田者。

b. 耕田者宋人也。

耕田者有宋人。

- c. 兔觸株。

觸株者兔也。

兔有觸株者。

2. Passive Constructions

In the following examples, note how *active verbs* are changed into *passive verb* constructions. Translate:

- a. 宋人笑之。

身爲宋人笑。

- b. 耕者得兔。

兔爲耕者得。

Note that 可 is a **passive** construction: “can be . . .,” “cannot be . . .” (Sometimes there is the further implication of “*should be*” or “*should not be*.”)

- a. 兔觸株。

株不可觸。

b. 耕者守株。

株者不可守。

c. 耕者得兔。

兔不可得。

3. Coordinate Verbs and Antecedent Conditions

The following sentences test whether the first verb in a pair of coordinate verbs is truly independent or if it serves as an antecedent condition. Translate to see if the sentences make sense:

a. 兔走而觸株。

兔觸株而走。

b. 兔折頸而死。

兔死而折頸。

c. 釋其耒而守株。

守株而釋其耒。

4. How to Build a Complex Sentence

Notice how each sentence builds upon the one above it. Translate each of them.

治民。

欲治民。

欲以政治民。

欲以先王之政治民。

欲以先王之政治當世之民。

欲以先王之政治當世之民此類也。

欲以先王之政治當世之民皆此類也。

今欲以先王之政治當世之民皆守株之類也。