

Lesson 2

Parts of Speech

Readers of literary Chinese must always be aware of the flexibility of word-classes. Depending on context, verbs become nouns, nouns become verbs, and intransitive verbs (verbs without direct objects) become transitive.

In general we have two major ways of determining what part of speech—what role—a character has in a sentence. A character's *regular usage* is an important initial guide for deciding its word-class. However, classical usage often is different from modern. For example, the character 言 frequently is a *verb*, “to say,” in literary Chinese, whereas in modern Mandarin it usually is a noun, “word.” Therefore, for beginning students of literary Chinese, **concordances** can be very useful for establishing how a character was used in a particular period or by a particular author.

Context provides the second major guide to a character's word-class. The overall structure of the sentence usually tells you the role of a particular word (see Introduction). In the end, *a character's position in the sentence is more important than its usual usage.*

Dictionaries for Reading Literary Chinese

Most small dictionaries, whether Chinese-Chinese or Chinese-English, are woefully inadequate for the study of pre-modern texts. Luckily, scholars in China and Japan have produced large but usable dictionar-

ies. One should become familiar with them as quickly as possible. The two best dictionaries are:

Morohashi Tetsuji 諸橋轍次, *Daikanwa jiten* 大漢和辭典 (Tokyo: Taishukan shoten, 1955–1960), 12 vols.

and

Hànyǔ dàcídiǎn 漢語大詞典 (Hong Kong: Sanlian, 1987), 12 vols.

These dictionaries are organized in the traditional **radical + stroke-count** format. That is, each character is constructed of a general classifying element (the radical) and, unless the character is itself a radical, some other elements, often used to indicate the sound. For example:

桂 “cassia tree” (*guì*, **kiweg*) = 木 (radical #75) + 圭 (*guī*, **kiweg*), 6 strokes

江 “river” (*jiāng*, **kǔng*) = 水 (radical #85) + 工 (*gōng*, **kung*), 3 strokes

In other cases, the character as a whole portrays a meaning, but the traditional classification system selects one part of the character as the radical, as in

上 = 一 (radical #1) + two strokes (the *upper* part)

Consider the entries in the 漢語大詞典 that are relevant to reading 雨 as *yù* in the text for this lesson. First is the entry for 雨 itself.

雨² [yù 《广韵》王遇切, 去遇, 云] ①降雨。《诗·小雅·大田》: “雨我公田遂及我私。”唐韩愈《袁州祭神文》之一: “以久不雨苗且盡死。”

This is the *second* pronunciation listed for 雨 in the dictionary. The entry uses a standard format. First it gives a *fǎnqiè* reading from one of the early rhyming dictionaries, in this case the *Guǎngyùn* 廣韻. Shown here is the first definition, which consists of two sections: a definition in modern Chinese (written in simplified characters), followed by citations from early texts as examples of actual uses.

The next example is for the phrase 天雨. The phrase is under “天” and listed according to the stroke-count of 雨 (8 strokes).

【天雨】天降雨。战国宋玉《高唐赋》：“遇天雨之新霽兮，觀百谷之俱集”《史记·老子韩非列传》：“宋有富人，天雨牆壞。”

Once again, the dictionary first gives a definition and then offers examples. (The second example occurs in the lesson below, even though the dictionary cites the 史記 rather than 韓非子.)

Text: 宋國富人(韓非子)

1. 宋有富人，天雨牆壞。
2. 其子曰：不築，必將有盜。
3. 其鄰人之父亦云。
4. 暮而果大亡其財。此夕盜至故大亡也。
5. 其家甚智其子，而疑鄰人之父。

Vocabulary

富	<i>fù</i> (v), to be wealthy	築	<i>zhù</i> (n), a ram > (v), to ram earth for a wall
韓非子	Hán Fēi Zǐ, Warring States Legalist/Taoist philosopher	必	<i>bì</i> (v), to be necessarily so
天	<i>tiān</i> (n), sky, heaven	將	<i>jiāng</i> (adv) [future marker]
雨	<i>yǔ</i> (n), rain > <i>yù</i> (v), to rain	盜	<i>dào</i> (n), thief
牆	<i>qiáng</i> (n), wall	鄰	<i>lín</i> (n), neighbor
壞	<i>huài</i> (v), to break	之	<i>zhī</i> (fw) [marker of explicit subordination]
其	<i>qí</i> (adj), his, hers, its, their	父	<i>fù</i> (n), father
子	<i>zǐ</i> (n), son	亦	<i>yì</i> (adv), also
曰	<i>yuē</i> (v), to say	云	<i>yún</i> (v), “to say [it]”

暮	mù (n), sunset > (v), the sun sets	夕	xì (n), evening
而	ér (fw) [explicit verb co-ordinator]	至	zhì (v), arrive
果	guǒ (adv), as anticipated	故	gù (adv), therefore
大	dà (v), great > (adv) greatly	也	yě (fw), [final: nominal phrase]
亡	wáng (v), leave, flee	家	jiā (n), household
財	cái (n), wealth	甚	shèn (adv), extremely
此	cǐ (n), this	智	zhì (v), to be wise
		疑	yí (v), to doubt, suspect

Grammar Notes

1. 天雨 In sentence 1, the second half of the line could be read as a **topic-comment**: “As for the sky’s rain: the wall broke.” However, the more natural reading is simply as a pair of topics with verbal comments: “The sky: rained; the wall: broke.” In this second reading, however, 雨 changes from a *noun* into a *verb*. This possibility is well established in classical usage.

2. 不築 Although there is no doubt that 築 is a verb (it is negated by 不), the character initially referred to a rod used to ram earth; only later was the meaning transferred from the tool to the action of using that tool. Such transferences were common.

3. 鄰人 In literary Chinese, nouns (鄰) easily modify other nouns (人). Since not all characters that modify nouns are adjectives, and most of what we consider adjectives in English also are stative verbs (赤 “red”, 小 “small”), it is best initially to use “modifier” rather than “adjective.”

4. 暮 usually is a noun meaning “sunset,” but the use of 而, a marker of coordination between verbs, forces us to treat it as a verb, “the sun sets.”

5. 果 The character 果 essentially means “fruit” (a noun), but very early it came to refer to results that arise from an action, “the fruit”

and “to bear fruit” (a verb), as it were. Then by extension, 果 and 果然 took on the adverbial meaning “as we might expect from such circumstances,” or more simply “in fact.”

6. 大亡 Ordinarily 大 is a verb, “to be big.” Here, however, since it clearly modifies 亡, it becomes an adverb meaning “greatly.”

7. 亡其財 The verb 亡 usually means “to go, depart, leave.” It does not take a direct object. Here, however, 其財 clearly serves as a direct object. When an intransitive verb takes a direct object, the verb acquires a *causative* meaning: here 亡其財 becomes “causes his wealth to go.”

8. 故大亡也 This comment illustrates the **nominalization** of a verbal sentence with the function word 也. The sentence ends an *explanation* of a situation: “Thus it was *a case of* (or *a matter of*) 大亡.”

9. 甚智其子 The verb 智 usually means “to be wise” (often in a crafty way) and is intransitive. Here 其子 is its direct object. This is another example of the rule explained in (7), and the phrase means “cause (or take) his son to be wise.”

Exercises

1. Translate the following pairs of phrases to reflect the changes in word-class. Look up any character you do not understand.

Nouns > Verbs

a. 時雨降。

天雨。

b. 天有春夏秋冬夏旦暮之期。

暮而果大亡其財。

Intransitive Verbs > Transitive Verbs

c. 其子不智。

其家甚智其子。

Verbs > Adverbs

d. 其財之亡大。

大亡其財。

2. Note that some verbs in both English and literary Chinese can be either transitive or intransitive in normal usage:

The plate broke.

John broke the plate.

Translate:

牆壞。

大雨壞牆。

3. Translate the following and indicate what shifts in word-class have occurred. (If you do not know a character or expression, use a dictionary.)

其子能赤其面而白其睛

過客駐征軒

4. Write the **radical** for each of the following characters; explain what it means and why the radical is used in that character; then indicate the number of strokes in the remainder of the character.

a. 鄰

b. 盜

c. 智

d. 牆

e. 壞

5. Look up the following characters and copy the entries that explain their usage in the story “宋國富人.”

a. 果

b. 亡

Reference: This is the context for 《宋國富人》 in 韓非子:

昔者鄭武公欲伐胡。故先以其女妻胡君以娛其意。因問於群臣，吾欲用兵。誰可伐者。大夫關其思對曰，胡可伐。武公怒而戮之曰，胡，兄弟之國也。子言伐之，何也。胡君聞之。以鄭爲親己。遂不備鄭。鄭人襲胡，取之。宋有富人。天雨牆壞。其子曰，不築，必將有盜。其鄰人之父亦云。暮而果大亡其財。其家甚智其子而疑鄰人之父。二人說者皆當矣。厚者爲戮，薄者見疑。則非知之難也。處之則難也。(韓非子，說難)