LESSON SEVEN

Review and compare the complex and simplified characters at the bottom of p. 130. This lesson brings us back to an earlier point: the key to understanding any sentence is to identify the verb and correctly interpret the space after the verb, be that space occupied by one or several characters. The formula is V____. For a co-verb-Verb structure the formula is v____V____ because the second verb is the main verb and the co-verb amounts to an adverbial phrase modifying the main verb. This lesson introduces some compounds where the space after the verb is occupied by a one-character object. To speak is *shuo-hua* 說話, to write is *xie-zi* 寫字. These are verb-object compounds, literally, to say-words, to write-characters. The object noun can usually be expanded by inserting an adjective before it: *shuo zhongquo hua* 說中國話, speak Chinese. Here three characters fill the space after the verb *shuo* 說. Note that the verb *yuxi* 預習 (“preview,” p. 126 #19) does not have verb-object internal grammar like *xiezi* 寫字 and *shuohua* 說話 but rather is an adverb-verb compound. *Bangzhu* 幫助 (“help,” p. 125) and *fuxi* 復習 (“review”) may be regarded as doubled hence equal verbs: “join with and lend effort” for *bangzhu* 幫助 and “return and repeat” for *fuxi* 複習. (The *fu* 複 of *fuxi* 複習 could also be interpreted as a modifier of *xi* 習.)

Let us pause to consider the word *jiao* 教, to teach, on p. 126. Note first that like *xue* 學 (study) it has the graph for child (zi 子) at the bottom. Moreover, if you look at the complex form of *xue* 學 and then remove the flanking structure of the top half, you are left with the left hand of *jiao* 教, namely two X-shapes over a child, the X-shapes presumably representing some kind of imitation or following of an example and giving us the phonetic. So we are really looking at the same word from top down (*jiao* 教) or bottom up (*xue* 學). Since the right hand element of *jiao* 教 is usually a causative of some kind, we might interpret the graph as “to cause to learn” = to teach. The left hand of *jiao* 教 is pronounced *xiao* 孝, probably the central social value term of traditional China, filial piety, devotion to parents, which of course also involves following their example.

Returning now to the matter of the space after the verb, we take up the descriptive complements as discussed on p. 133. The first sentence on this page illustrates a crucial structure: verb-de-complement, *xie-de-henacao* 寫得
很好．We find the verb xie 写, to write, occurs twice in this sentence. The first time xie 写 precedes the object zi 字, character/s, thus setting up the topic of the sentence. The second time xie 写 precedes an adverbial phrase describing the verb, how the action was performed, in this case “well.” The description of the action is always preceded by the verb de 得 (no tone), hence the henhao 很好 is sometimes called a post-verbal modifier or complement, since adverbs normally precede the verb in Chinese. In these cases of post-verbal comment on an action the function of the de 得 retains a little of the meaning of the original verb: attain, obtain. (Make a note on the three pronunciations of de 得, second tone, toneless, and dei 得, page 135 first sentence.) The toneless de 得 introduces a sort of result or evaluation of the action: “He writes so that the resulting characters are well done.” The correct form of de 得 is given on page 133, but mainland texts occasionally substitute the other de 得, the one equivalent to the de 的 on p. 37 indicating possession. However the sound de is written, context almost always makes its function clear. The duplication of the verb xie 写 is usually found when a general statement is being made.

The second sentence on page 133 is grammatically identical with the first, but the third introduces a slight variation: the object stands alone in front of the verb. Why is the general rule, verb before object, reversed here? My guess is that the Chinese feel a need to balance their sentences, and so to keep the verb more or less in the center of the sentence the object is swung before it. This is especially useful in this kind of sentence since the post-verbal information could take up quite a bit of space, so it’s best to have the object out of the way and clearly foregrounded.

The examples of how to use cai 才 and jiu 就 were covered at the end of lesson five. Review the examples here. Why is there no le 了 after a cai 才 sentence? Perhaps it is because the sentence is about fulfilling a condition rather than a sequence in time. Jiu 就 always has to do with sequence of some kind, temporal or logical, but cai 才 follows the condition under which a verb happens, and precedes that verb itself. The emphasis is not temporal flow but the circumstances of an event. We will see other “past tense” sentences which use no le 了．But Chinese has no verb tenses at all, and so le 了 of course does not mean that the Chinese language has a past tense. A further explanation of the functions of le 了 will come later.