

# Mandarin morphosyntax reading note

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This note is my reading note of 朱德熙 (2009). It can be seen as a preparation of [this book](#), which is premature and possibly will never be finished, especially by someone without systematic linguistic training like me. Still, the theoretical orientation of this note is well introduced in the above link, as well as in [my notes about CGEL](#), [my notes about Latin](#), and [this note about how descriptive grammars work](#). 朱德熙 (2009) is commonly referred to as a typical structuralist book of Chinese. I do not say “structuralist grammar” because the book is also a textbook about structuralism, mostly in Bloomfield’s brand and strikingly close to the The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language (CGEL) (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002) approach summarized in the above notes, with a lot of argumentation, more than what ordinary grammars contain.

## 1 About Zhu’s book

### 1.1 The object language

The object language, “Chinese”, needs some clarification. It means Standard Modern Chinese or Standard Modern Mandarin, often abbreviated as Mandarin in the English speaking world. In mainland China it is called 普通话. In Taiwan and Singapore it (with small variations) is called 国语.

Standard Mandarin – like other languages – is an evolving language. Certain usages documented in Zhu’s book have already been obsoleted.

### 1.2 Organization of chapters

The book can be divided into several parts:

- Chapters 1-6 are about morphology and lexical categories. Lexical categories discussed in details are either nominal or verbal.
- Chapters 7-10 together give a top-down analysis of syntactic constructions without coordination. Serial verb constructions are *not* introduced in these chapters.
- Chapter 11 is about coordination.
- Chapter 12 is about serial verb construction.
- Chapter 13-14 are about prepositions and adverbs.
- Chapter 15 is about clause types.
- Chapter 16 is about sentence final particle (SFP).
- Chapter 17 is about clause linking without canonical coordination.
- Chapter 18 is about ellipsis and inversion, which may be roughly said to be about information packaging.

This organization is an example of § 2.2 in [this note about how descriptive grammars work](#). The relation between the first six chapters and the following four is the item and arrangement strategy relation. Within the chapters 7-10, we see the top-down partition of clauses and NPs introduced in § 3 and § 4 in [this note about how descriptive grammars work](#). This is typical in structuralist works: it is a direct reflection of the top-down analysis of syntactic structures (see § 2.2.2 and § 3 in [this note about how descriptive grammars work](#)).

The noun-verb distinction (§ 2.2.3 in [this note about how descriptive grammars work](#)) is only reflected in nominal categories being introduced in chap. 4, while verbal categories being

introduced in chap. 5. The NP structure is introduced in chap. 10, together with their clausal counterparts.

The relation between the first twelve chapters and chapters 13 and 14 is the relation between canonical constructions and their counterparts with adjunction. The relation between the first fourteen chapters and chap. 15 is the relation between canonical constructions and non-canonical ones related to the former ones by transformation rules.

Chapters 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, and 14 constitute a system quite similar to the chapter 4-8 in CGEL: first clausal complements, including the external complement – the subject – and internal complements, then NPs, then how the two are modified, by adjectives and adverbs, or by more complicated PPs.

Chapter 16 actually can be placed before chap. 13. This is not the order used in the book, the reason of which, in generative terms, seems to be that SFPs are merged in higher projections than what is involved from chap. 7 to chap. 15. Zhu, however, regard most of SFPs as a part of the predicate. The contradiction between the arrangement of chapters and the explicit analysis of SFPs as a part of the predicate in § 16.1.1 in 朱德熙 (2009) will be discussed in

### 1.3 Terminology

The terminology used in the book is closer to the CGEL approach rather than the Basic Linguistic Theory (BLT) approach. It should be noted that the book is written in Mandarin Chinese, in which certain linguistic terms do not have morpheme-to-morpheme counterparts in English or already have different meaning than their morpheme-to-morpheme counterparts in English.

For lexical categories, 体词 means ‘referential word’ i.e. nominal words. Its direct translation would be ‘body-word’, which may be understood by some as ‘content word’ i.e. ‘lexical word’. The term 谓词 means ‘verbal word’. The direct translation would be ‘commenting-word’, which may be understood as somehow “predicative” in the sense of predicative complements in CGEL. This is not correct: 谓词 means what can head a predicate, thus verbs and adjectives in Chinese. The term 实词 ‘substantial word’ means lexical words, while 虚词 ‘virtual word’ means function words.

The term 谓语 means predicate in the CGEL sense. The term 述语 means predicator in the CGEL sense. Unlike earlier structuralist works which work in the vanilla phrase structure grammar (PSG) framework, 朱德熙 (2009) uses a CGEL-like PSG, where a label of a constituent in a larger construction contains both its category label and its function label, for example both “NP” and “subject”. This idea is made explicit in § 1.3.10. The analysis of 我们班有许多外国留学生 in § 1.3.8 is a good example. Unlike CGEL, 朱德熙 (2009) uses a more compact format in which constituents are illustrated by underlining to show the constituency tree. This is, of course, merely a notational problem, but somehow it becomes a tradition of the School Grammar analysis of Chinese.

### 1.4 About this note

This note try to rearrange the content of 朱德熙 (2009) in a way that is both acceptable in the approaches in BLT and CGEL. The order of this note is largely bottom-up. Certain top-down analyses, of course, will be given in the grammar sketch chapter.

## 2 Grammar sketch

The first chapter in 朱德熙 (2009) may be thought as a grammar sketch chapter, but it contains much discussion on theoretical issues (replicating what is discussed in CGEL § 1.4). This section is a more compact grammar sketch, skipping theoretical commitments which can be found in sources at the beginning of this note. Chapter 3 is also a short one and may be regarded as a part of the grammar sketch.

I will roughly follow Jacques (2021) in the organization of this section. However, since in Chinese, dependency relations are not mainly coded by morphology, I will replace the “nominal morphology” section by “noun phrase” and replace the “verbal morphology” section by “clause structure”, and do not give constituent order a special section, since constituent order is covered by the constituency structure. This is a major difference between CGEL-like “structuralist”

grammars and BLT-based “functionalist” grammars (§ 1 in [this note about how descriptive grammars work](#)).

## 2.1 Parts of speech

Since Chinese does not rich grammatical relation-bearing morphology, purely syntactic tests play the major role in determining parts of speech. Semantics may help but is never decisive (§ 3.1.1 and § 3.1.2 in 朱德熙 (2009)). The word class division given in the book inevitably meets the problem that a word may belong to two categories depending on the context.<sup>1</sup> The analysis adopted here mini

## 3 Morphology

### 3.1 Morphemes

### 3.2 Duplication

### 3.3 Compounding

### 3.4 What is a word?

## 4 Sentence final particles

## References

Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey K. Pullum. *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*. Cambridge University Press, 2002. doi: 10.1017/9781316423530.

Guillaume Jacques. *A grammar of Japhug*, volume 1. Language Science Press, 2021.

朱德熙. 语法讲义. In 朱德熙文集, 第一卷. 商务印书馆, 2009.

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<sup>1</sup>Formally, we may say the word prototypically belong to one category, and its usage as a word in another category involves zero derivation.