

**AN EXPOSITION OF THE  
CONSTRUCTION AND  
IDIOMS OF CHINESE  
SENTENCES**

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An Exposition of the Construction and Idioms of Chinese Sentences by A. Sydenstricker

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AN EXPOSITION  
OF THE  
CONSTRUCTION AND IDIOMS  
OF  
CHINESE SENTENCES,  
AS FOUND IN  
COLLOQUIAL MANDARIN.

*For the use of Learners of the Language.*

BY  
A. SYDENSTRICKER.

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## PREFACE.

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THE following little volume is the result of the author's studies of the idioms and construction of Chinese colloquial. It is of course crude, imperfect and unfinished, as every first attempt almost necessarily is. Friendly criticism is invited.

The author had not studied Chinese long before he felt convinced that there was a far better method of acquiring a speaking knowledge of it than by learning every sentence by rote *de novo*. Having acquired the words and their use, there must be some general principles by which they are construed into sentences.

Three things seem essential to acquire Chinese, or in fact, any foreign language: First, A correct pronunciation, that is, one free from our native accent. This, in Chinese, includes a correct enunciation of the tones. This pronunciation is of course gotten from the native teacher, guided, however, by the experience and directions of older foreign speakers of the language. The beginner makes perhaps no more serious blunder than to follow his own crude pronunciation, acquired through his untrained ears, in preference to the experience of acknowledged authorities. If the pronunciation is faulty, the very foundation of his acquirements in the language is corrupt and vitiated. Second, A correct use of words. This is derived at first from dictionaries, &c.; afterwards from the people themselves. Third, A correct knowledge and use of the idioms and construction of sentences. This volume is an humble attempt to guide the student in this third department of knowledge. Whether the author has succeeded or not, is not for him to judge; if he has, he will be grateful; if not, he will not be disappointed.

If any are disposed to criticise my devoting precious time to such work as this, I simply answer, That this has been my method of studying the language. While I have heard others speak of memorizing sentences by the score, I can truly say that I have committed to memory scarcely a dozen sentences in all the several dialects that I have had occasion to study. My plan has always been to acquire words with their pronunciation and use, and thus combine them into sentences in accordance with

some general rules or principles. Given the rule, any number of sentences may be correctly formed by it, thus avoiding the irksome task of committing to memory every sentence.

I would by no means underrate phrase books which have their use, especially for beginners, and a very important use too. Nor would I throw overboard grammars which are exceedingly useful, especially in giving one a general view of the language. In writing this volume, I have consulted all the phrase books and grammars on Chinese that I could secure, that is to say, about all written in the English language, and while I willingly acknowledge the help derived from them, yet I must say that they very often left me to grope my own way; so that this volume, whether a failure or success, has at least the merit of being, to a large extent, an original production.

The principles and rules, &c., laid down, are given rather as general guides or finger-posts than as rigid rules that must be mechanically adhered to in forming sentences. I do not claim the name of grammar for the book, since many things belonging to that department are not here discussed; such as style, tone, dialectic distinctions, &c. I have confined myself strictly to construction and idioms and need Romanized spelling simply as a help to the student in reading the sentences. Hence, tone-marks are omitted, and hence, also, I have adopted a *general* pronunciation—a combination of Northern and Southern Mandarin, omitting the local pronunciations of each, a pronunciation which I have found to be of the greatest service among all classes of mandarin-speaking natives.

A table of it will be found in Appendix No. II. It is of course imperfect. I have spelt the short tones of the peculiar *sh* and *ch* and *j* sounds by simply adding a *h* after a hyphen, e.g., 石 *sh-h*, 日 *j-h*, &c. One is almost tempted to change the initial *j* to *r*, as the latter is widely used, but *j* is certainly scientifically more correct, since it is simply the aspirated *s* (*j=s-h*) of Chiangnan. Here, as in one or two other places, strict accuracy *may* have been sacrificed to scientific correctness. One more remark on the spelling seems called for. The initial *i* I have always spelt *yi*, and *o*, *wo*, &c. *I* may be more correct, but as *y* is distinctly heard before *in*, *ing*, &c., I have added it in all these initials for the sake of uniformity.

And now the volume is committed to the public, the book-shelf, or the waste-basket, whichever place is the most suitable for it.

A. SYDENSTRICKER.

T'SING-KIANG-P'U, 1889.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE ANALYSIS AND FORMATION OF WORDS.

SINCE in Mandarin Colloquial many words are often, and in many cases necessarily, made up of two or more characters, we must in accordance with our general plan, begin with the *Analysis and Formation of Words*. We give simply a general outline of the formation of those compounds which will at the same time show their component parts, or analysis.

I. Many single characters which of themselves express the whole meaning intended by the word in question, yet add a character in order to distinguish words that otherwise would be alike or similar to other words in sound, *i.e.*, for clearness of expression and ease of pronunciation.

1st. The characters added may be mere suffixes, and as such lose their own meaning and are combined in pronunciation with the preceding character. Such are

(1). 子 *ts* and 兒 *er*, both meaning "son" when alone, but losing this meaning when appended—*e.g.*, 桌子 *chob-ts* table, 椅子 *yi-ts* chair, 盤子 *p'an-ts* plate, 身子 *shen-ts* body, 驢子 *lü-ts* donkey, 厨子 *ch'u-ts* cook, 鳥兒 *niao-er* bird, 花兒 *hua-er* flower, 瓶兒 *p'ing-er* bottle, 門兒 *men-er* door, &c.

*Remarks.*—1. Perhaps usage alone decides which of the above two characters is to be added to a given word. In some cases either may be used. In general, the Southern Mandarin, with its dialects, prefers 子 *ts*, while the Northern Mandarin, with its dialects, prefers 兒 *er*.

2. The excessive use of 兒 *er* is very vulgar. Hence, it is more common among the uneducated than among the cultured. In public speaking, especially, one should be careful of its use, as the excessive use of it tends rather to the confusion than the clear distinction of sounds.

3. When 兒 *er* is combined in pronunciation with the preceding character, the final nasal (*n* or *ng*) of the latter is generally dropped or only slightly heard. Thus, 鎖兒 *c'hien-er* becomes *c'hier*, 門兒 *men-er* becomes *mer*, &c.

4. 兒 *er* is sometimes (vulgarily) added to words already disyllabic: 窩窩兒 *'uh-lung-er* (*'u-lur*), hole, 鷄子兒 *chi-ts-er* (*chi-tear*) hen's egg.



(2). 頭 *T'eu*, head, is added (a) to names of material things having a blockish shape: 木頭 *muh-t'eu* wood, 石頭 *sh-h-t'eu* stone, 日頭 *j-h-t'eu* sun, 指頭 *ch-t'eu* finger, 拳頭 *c'hüen-t'eu* fist, 榔頭 *lang-t'eu* hammer; (b) to monosyllabic verbs in order to give them the force of abstract nouns: 看 *k'an* to look, 看頭 *k'an-t'eu* something to look at; 聽 *t'ing* to listen, 聽頭 *t'ing-t'eu* something to listen to; 望 *wang* to hope, 望頭 *wang-t'eu* hope; 說 *shoh* to say, speak, 說頭 *shoh-t'eu* something to say; 念 *nien* to think, 念頭 *nien-t'eu* thoughts; (c) to locative terms intimating the extremity or end. Here its meaning "head" is not entirely lost sight of: 西 *hsi* west, 西頭 *hsi-t'eu* west end; 東 *tung* east, 東頭 *tung-t'eu* east end; 這 *che* this, 這頭 *che-t'eu* this end, 那 *na* that, 那頭 *na-t'eu* that end; 裡頭 *li-t'eu* inside, 外頭 *wai-t'eu* outside, 上頭 *shang-t'eu* topside, etc.

(3). 處 *C'hu*, place, is added to a limited number of words forming abstracts: 益處 *yih-c'hu* advantage, 好處 *hao* good, 好處 *hao-c'hu* benefit; 害 *hai* to injure, 害處 *hai-c'hu* injury; 地 *ti* ground, 地處 *ti-chu* place; 難 *nan* difficult, 難處 *nan-c'hu* difficulty.

Remark.—In some compounds the meaning "place" is distinctly retained in 處 *c'hu*: 坐 *tsò* to sit, 坐處 *tsò-c'hu* place, or room to sit; 走 *tsèu* to walk, 走處 *tsèu-c'hu* place to walk; 樂 *loh* to rejoice, 樂處 *loh-c'hu* place, or ground for rejoicing; 明 *ming* bright, open, 明處 *ming-c'hu* in an open place, openly.

(4). 家 *Chia*, family, is added to nouns relating to individuals: 人家 *jen-chia* person, 國家 *kueh-chia* kingdom, 自家 *ts-chia* oneself.

2nd. The first character is sometimes repeated, chiefly those denoting family relations: 哥哥 *ko-ko* elder brother, 弟弟 *ti-ti* younger brother, 妹妹 *mei-mei* younger sister, 爸爸 *pa-pa* papa, 媽媽 *ma-ma*, mamma, 鎮鎮 *mo-mo* loaves (native).

Note.—Many monosyllabic words are repeated for the sake of emphasis. A discussion of these does not concern us now.

3rd. Often two synonyms are united to form a word: 朋友 *p'eng-yu* friend, 功勞 *kung-lao*, merit, 弟兄 *ti-hsiung* brethren, brother, 查考 *c'ha-kao* to investigate, 埋葬 *mai-tsang* to bury, 觀看 *kuan-k'an* to behold, 歡喜 *huan-hsi* to rejoice, 靈魂 *ling-huen* soul.

Remark.—Usage largely decides which of these two synonyms precedes. In some words either may begin the word: 葬埋 *tsang-mai* and 埋葬 *mai-tsang*, 查考 *c'ha-kao* and 考查 *k'ao-c'ha*, 靈魂 *ling-huen* and 魂靈 *huen-ling*, 歡喜 *huan-hsi* and 喜歡 *hsi-huan*, &c. It might be said that where the two characters are identical in meaning, and interchangeable, either of them may precede.

II. In very many cases no single character contains the whole meaning intended to be conveyed in the word; hence, combination is resorted to.

1st. Characters conveying opposite extremes of meaning are united to denote the meaning contained between the two extremes: 深 *shen* deep, 淺 *c'hien* shallow, 深淺 *shen-c'hien* depth; 輕 *c'hing* light, 重 *chung* heavy, 輕重 *c'hing-chung* weight; 長 *c'hang* long, 短 *tuan* short, 長短 *c'hang-tuan* length; 多 *to* many, 少 *shao* few, 多少 *to-shao* amount, how much? 來 *lai* come, 往 *wang*, go, 來往 *lai-wang* intercourse; 買 *mai* buy, 賣 *mai* sell, 買賣 *mai-mai* mercantile business; 好 *hao* good, 歹 *tai* bad, 好歹 *hao-tai* quality; 遠 *yuén* distant, 近 *chin* near, 遠近 *yuén-chin* distance.

Remark.—Here also, perhaps, usage decides which of the terms precedes.

2nd. Abstract nouns are formed by adding the character 法 *fah* plan, to verbs referring to the *modus operandi*: 做 *iao* to do, make, 做法 *iao-fah* the plan of doing; 念 *nien* to read, 念法 *nien-fah* plan, method of reading; 救 *chiu* to save, 救法 *chiu-fah* plan of salvation; 教 *chiao* to teach, 教法 *chiao-fah* method of teaching.

3rd. Here the first character in the word is specific in meaning, the second is general. Thus the first limits, and so modifies, the meaning of the second (compare the English "lamp-wick," "tea-pot," "house-boy," &c.): 草料 *ts'ao-liao* (*lit.* grass material) feed, 馬兵 *ma-ping* (*lit.* horse soldiers) cavalry, 燈草 *teng ('sao* (lamp grass) lamp-wick, 德行 *teh-hsing* (virtuous acting) virtue, 主人 *chu-zen* (lord man) master, 用人 *yung-zen* (use man) servant, 醫生 *yi-sheng* (heal life) physician, 親愛 *c'hin-ai* (relatives' love) love of relatives (to each other), 憐愛 *lien-ai* (pity love) love springing from pity, 察看 *ch'ah-k'an* (investigate look) to examine, 哀求 *ai o'hiu* (grief entreaty) entreaty (springing from a sense of misery). So also a man's name and title: 張先生 *Chang hsien-sheng*, Mr. or teacher Chang, 李大哥 *Li ta-ko* elder brother Li, 包醫生 *Pao yi-sheng* Dr. Pao, etc.

This method of combination is very common, and may be extended to any required need. Almost any characters suitable to convey any desired meaning may be thus combined. Witness the facility with which the Chinese coin words to designate foreign innovations: 輪船 *luen chuan* (wheel boat) steamer, 鐵路 *t'ieh-lu* (iron road) railway, 電報 *tien-pao* (electric message) telegram, etc.

4th. Composite terms denoting occupations are made up of a verb and its object referring to the occupation in question, followed by the descriptive particle 的 *tih*: 掌櫃 *chang-kuei* to have charge of the money chest, 掌櫃的 *chang-huei-tih* accountant; 看門 *k'an-men* to watch the door, 看門的 *k'an-men-tih* porter; 念書 *nien shu* to read or recite books, 念書的 *nien shu tih* student; 趕腳 *kan-chioh* to drive animals (*lit.* feet), 趕腳的 *kan-chioh-tih* muleteer, 推車 *t'uei c'he* to push barrows, 推車的 *t'uei c'he tih* barrowman, etc. The particle 的 *tih* is a relative-descriptive character, and means *he, who* or *that which* performs the action designated by the verb.

Remarks.—In a few cases 的 *tih* is omitted, in others 人 *jen* takes the place of 的 *tih*; further, *jen* may be added to composites with 的 *tih*, making the appellation more distinct: 先知 *hsien-ch* (fore know) prophets, 細作 *hsi-tsoh* spies, 讀書人 *tsu-shu-jen*, students 買賣的人 *mai-mai tih jen* merchants (*lit.* those who buy and sell).

III. Finally, there are a few words, chiefly onomatopoeic, that cannot be analyzed: 咳嗽 *k'eh-seu* cough, 阿嚏 *a-t'i* to sneeze, 哈哈 *ha-ha* loud laughter, 呼呼 *huh-huh* sound of wind, 哈喇呢 *ha-na-ni* broad (*lit.* Holland) cloth, 鴉片 *ya-p'ien* opium, etc.