

UNIT SEVEN

Subject–predicate and topic–comment sentences

A Sentences in Chinese may be divided into two basic categories: subject–predicate and topic–comment. Subject–predicate sentences are generally used for narrative purposes, whereas topic–comment sentences provide description or comment. The former essentially express an action, while the latter express a state:

他们昨天去钓鱼。 **tāmen zuótiān qù diàoyú**
They went fishing yesterday.
(他们 **tāmen** subject, 去钓鱼 **qù diàoyú** predicate)

他们的爱好是钓鱼。 **tāmen de àihào shì diàoyú**
Their hobby is fishing.
(他们的爱好 **tāmen de àihào** topic, 是钓鱼 **shì diàoyú** comment)

B The subject in a subject–predicate sentence must always be of definite reference:

火车到达终点站。 **huǒchē dàodá zhōngdiǎnzhàn**
The train arrived at the terminal station.

孩子今天过生日。 **háizi jīntiān guò shēng rì**
It is the child's birthday today. (*lit.* The child today has/passes birthday.)

One cannot normally say:

*一辆火车到达终点站。 **yī liàng huǒchē dàodá zhōngdiǎnzhàn**
(*lit.* A train arrived at the terminal station.)

C In subject–predicate sentences, the subject may act as either initiator or recipient of an action:

(1) The subject as initiator:

我去年学驾驶。 **wǒ qùnián xué jiàshǐ**
I took driving lessons last year.

他在打扫房间。 **tā zài dǎsǎo fángjiān**
He is tidying the room.

小红写了两封信。 **xiǎo hóng xiě le liǎng fēng xìn**
Xiao Hong wrote two letters.

她天天拉小提琴。 **tā tiāntiān lā xiǎotíqín**
She plays the violin every day.

(2) The subject as recipient:

When the subject is a recipient, verbs such as 受到 **shòudào** 'be a beneficiary or target of', 遭到 **zāodào** 'suffer from', 遇到 **yùdào** 'meet with', 得到 **dédào** 'gain', 'be a winner of', are used:

学生受到老师的表扬。 **xuésheng shòudào láoshī de biǎoyáng**
The students were commended by the teacher. (*lit.* The students received the teacher's praise.)

她家遭到盗窃。 **tā jiā zāodào dàoqiè**
Her house was burgled. (*lit.* Her house suffered a burglary.)

运动员得到一千镑奖金。 **yùndòngyuán dédào yī qiān bàng jiǎngjīn**
The athlete received a prize of one thousand pounds.

中国遭到特大洪水。 **zhōngguó zāodào tè dà hóngshuǐ**
China suffered a huge flood.

Note: The 被 **bèi** structure (see Unit 2) naturally falls into this category:

孩子被爸爸骂了一顿。 **háizi bèi bàba mà le yī dùn**
The child was told off/rebuked by his/her father.

鱼被小猫叼走了。 **yú bèi xiǎo māo diāo zǒu le**
The fish was taken/carried off by the kitten.

D In a topic–comment sentence the topic may be a noun, pronoun, verb, phrase or clause. The comment usually consists of either a 是 **shì** phrase, a 有 **yǒu** phrase, an adjective or adjectival phrase:

他们是运动员。 **tāmen shì yùndòngyuán**
They are athletes.
(他们 **tāmen** pronoun topic, 是 **shì** phrase as comment)

我有一个弟弟。 **wǒ yǒu yī gè dìdì**
I have a younger brother.
(我 **wǒ** pronoun topic, 有 **yǒu** phrase as comment)

这儿的空气很新鲜。 **zhèr de kōngqì hěn xīnxiǎn**

The air here is fresh.

(空气 **kōngqì** noun as topic, 很新鲜 **hěn xīnxiǎn** adjectival phrase as comment)

抽烟对健康有害。 **chōuyān duì jiànkāng yǒuhài**

Smoking is bad for health.

(抽烟 **chōuyān** verb as topic, 有害 **yǒuhài** adjective as comment)

他迟到是不对的。 **tā chídào shì bù duì de**

He shouldn't have been late. (lit. He arrive late was wrong.)

(他迟到 **tā chídào** clause as topic, 是 **shì** phrase as comment)

Note: The topic may be of definite or indefinite reference:

这个小女孩是我妹妹。 **zhè/zhèi gè xiǎo nǚhái shì wǒ mèimei**

This little girl is my younger sister.

蜘蛛有八只脚。 **zhīzhū yǒu bā zhī jiǎo**

A spider has eight legs.

E Sentences may also be identified as topic-comment structures in the following situations:

(1) When a modal verb is present:

一个人应该学一门外语。 **yī gè rén yīnggāi xué yī mén wàiyǔ**

One should learn a foreign language.

锻炼能增强人的体质。 **duànliàn néng zēngqiáng rén de tǐzhì**

Exercise can improve one's physique.

(2) When the sentence particle 了 **le** is incorporated (see Unit 8):

孩子上学去了。 **háizi shàngxué qù le**

The child has gone to school.

太阳出来了。 **tàiyáng chū lái le**

The sun has come out.

(3) When a passive notion is implied (without the use of 被 **bèi** structure):

衣服都洗干净了。 **yīfu dōu xǐ gānjìng le**

The clothes have all been washed.

饭煮好了。 **fàn zhǔ hǎo le**

The meal is ready. (lit. The food has been cooked.)

Note: In these 'passive' sentences, the topic is usually of definite reference and the sentence particle 了 **le** is always present.

- (4) When a verb is unmodified or unmarked for aspect and indicates a permanent characteristic:

猫吃鱼。 **māo chī yú**

Cats eat fish.

铁爱生锈。 **tiě ài shēngxiù**

Iron rusts easily. (*lit.* Iron is apt to rust.)

旅游增进见闻。 **lǚyóu zēngjìn jiànwén**

Travelling broadens knowledge.

他喜欢打篮球。 **tā xǐhuan dǎ lánqiú**

He likes playing basketball.

F Subject and topic, however, may be seen to coexist in the following types of constructions:

- (1) Topic | subject–predicate:

牛奶我已经喝了。 **niúǎi | wǒ yǐjīng hē le**

I have drunk the milk.

In this case, the subject–predicate structure 我已经喝了 **wǒ yǐjīng hē le** serves as a comment to the topic 牛奶 **niúǎi**. This kind of construction can be viewed as a ‘notional passive’ with the original object 牛奶 **niúǎi** of the transitive verb 喝 **hē** being moved to the beginning of the sentence.

However, in some cases the verb in a construction like this may take an object which has a part and whole relationship with the topic. For example:

马铃薯我削了皮了。 **mǎlíngshǔ | wǒ xiāo le pí le**

I have peeled the potatoes. (*lit.* Potatoes I have peeled the skins.)

Sometimes a complement (of location, duration, etc.) may be found after the verb in such constructions.

花儿妈妈插在花瓶里了。 **huār | māma chā zài huāpíng li le**

Mother has put the flowers in the vase.

(*lit.* Flowers mother has put in the vase.)

那个地方我们去过好几次了。

nà/nèi gè dìfang | wǒmen qù guo hǎo jǐ cì le

We have been to that place quite a number of times.

(*lit.* That place we have been to quite a number of times.)

(2) Subject | topic–comment:

这个孩子中文说得不错。 **zhè/zhèi gè hái zi | zhōng wén shuō de bù cuò**
This child speaks very good Chinese.

This construction is in most cases the reverse of the previous topic | subject–predicate format. The sentence, for example, may be reworded thus, posing 中文 **zhōng wén** ‘the Chinese language’ as the topic:

中文这个孩子说得不错。 **zhōng wén zhè/zhèi gè hái zi shuō de bù cuò**
This child speaks very good Chinese.

From this point of view, the two types of sentences: topic | subject–predicate, and subject | topic–comment are in fact similar in meaning and may both be counted as belonging to the topic–comment category, their only difference being in their word order and emphasis.

The above sentence can also be reworded thus:

这个孩子说中文说得不错。
zhè/zhèi gè hái zi | shuō zhōng wén shuō de bù cuò
This child speaks very good Chinese.

In this reworded sentence 孩子 **hái zi** ‘the child’ remains the subject (i.e. the initiator) of the verb (i.e. the action) 说 **shuō** ‘speak’ (here the second 说 **shuō**, in 说得不错 **shuō de bù cuò**). However, 说中文 **shuō zhōng wén** ‘speaking Chinese’ has now become the topic of the sentence rather than simply 中文 **zhōng wén** ‘Chinese’, and, as with the previous two examples, the sentence is obviously a topic and comment construction. The sentence could be further reformulated as 这个孩子的中文说得不错 **zhè/zhèi gè hái zi de zhōng wén shuō de bù cuò**, which is clearly a simple topic–comment sentence.

(3) Topic | topic–comment:

那个人年纪不小了。 **nà/nèi gè rén | nián jì bù xiǎo le**
That person isn’t young any more. (*lit.* That person age not small.)

我哥哥身体很好。 **wǒ gē ge | shēn tǐ hěn hǎo**
My elder brother is in good shape. (*lit.* Elder brother physique very good.)

中亚国家经济发展很快。 **zhōng yà guó jiā | jīng jì fā zhǎn hěn kuài**
The economic growth of central Asian countries is very fast.

Note: The second topic in the above constructions usually has a part and whole relationship with the first topic. In the first example, ‘age’ is related to ‘that person’; in the second, ‘physique’ is part of ‘elder brother’, and in the third, ‘economic development’ is an observable feature of ‘central Asian countries’.

Exercise 7.1

Indicate which of the following Chinese sentences are subject–predicate sentences and which are topic–comment structures:

- 1 我在研究中国历史。 **wǒ zài yánjiū zhōngguó lìshǐ**
I'm researching Chinese history.
- 2 这双皮鞋太大。 **zhè/zhèi shuāng píxié tài dà**
This pair of shoes is too big.
- 3 现在是两点半。 **xiànzài shì liǎng diǎn bàn**
It's half past two now.
- 4 这列火车有八节车厢。 **zhè/zhèi liè huǒchē yǒu bā jié chēxiāng**
This train has eight carriages.
- 5 我们遇到很大的困难。 **wǒmen yùdào hěn dà de kùnnan**
We came up against huge problems.
- 6 汽车修好了。 **qìchē xiū hǎo le**
The car has been repaired.
- 7 飞机准时起飞。 **fēijī zhǔnshí qǐfēi**
The plane departed on time.
- 8 喝茶对健康有益。 **hē chá duì jiànkāng yǒuyì**
Drinking tea is good for your health.
- 9 警察穿制服。 **jǐngchá chuān zhìfú**
Policemen wear uniform.
- 10 小李得到了一份好工作。 **xiǎo lǐ dédào le yī fèn hǎo gōngzuò**
Xiao Li got a good job.

Exercise 7.2

Rewrite the Chinese sentences below adding the subject given in the round brackets to the topic–comment structure and translate the resulting sentence into English:

- 1 药已经吃了。 **yào yǐjīng chī le**
The medicine was taken. (病人 **bìngrén** patients)
- 2 衣服都晾出去了。 **yīfu dōu liàng chūqù le**
All the washing has been hung out to dry. (我 **wǒ** I)
- 3 割草机借走了。 **gēcǎojī jiè zǒu le**
Somebody borrowed the lawnmower. (邻居 **línjū** neighbour)
- 4 那个问题讨论过没有？ **nà/nèi gè wèntí táolùn guo méiyǒu**
Has that question been discussed? (大家 **dàjiā** everybody)
- 5 第二篇文章写好了吗？ **dì èr piān wénzhāng xiě hǎo le ma**
Has the second essay been written? (你 **nǐ** you)
- 6 妈妈要的东西昨天买回来了。 **māma yào de dōngxi zuótiān mǎi huí lái le**
What mother wanted was bought yesterday. (爸爸 **bàba** father)

Exercise 7.3

Change the following 把 **bǎ** and 被 **bèi** constructions into topic-comment sentences, omitting the subject or adding the sentence particle 了 **le** where appropriate:

- 1 弟弟把积蓄都存进银行里去了。 **dìdì bǎ jīxù dōu cún jìn yínháng lǐ qù le**
Younger brother has put all his savings into the bank.
- 2 他已经把房间收拾好了。 **tā yǐjīng bǎ fángjiān sbōushi hǎo le**
He has tidied the room.
- 3 爸爸把那笔奖金捐给学校了。 **bàba bǎ nà/nèi bǐ jiǎngjīn juān gěi xuéxiào le**
Father has donated the prize money to the school.
- 4 我已经把这件事告诉他了。 **wǒ yǐjīng bǎ zhè/zhèi jiàn shì gàosu tā le**
I've already told him about this.
- 5 昨天买的香蕉全被他吃完了。
zuótiān mǎi de xiāngjiāo quán bèi tā chī wán le
The bananas which were bought yesterday were all eaten up by him.
- 6 剩下的饭菜被妈妈倒在阴沟里。
shèng xià de fàn cài bèi māma dào zài yīngōu lǐ
All the leftovers were tipped down the drain by mother.

Exercise 7.4

Translate the following into Chinese, making the underlined elements the topics of the sentences:

- 1 I have cleaned the room.
- 2 She has posted the two letters.
- 3 I have cooked the rice.
- 4 My younger brother has borrowed my father's car.
- 5 I have been to the Great Wall twice already.
- 6 Mother has given that box of chocolates to a friend.

UNIT EIGHT

Sentence particle 了 **le**

Sentence particle 了 **le** is a common and important feature of Chinese, in particular spoken Chinese. We saw in Unit 7 section E that the presence of 了 **le** at the end of a sentence converted the sentence into a topic–comment structure. This is because the speaker, in adding 了 **le**, is providing a personal gloss in reaction to a statement just made or to circumstances that may have become apparent. This gloss invariably introduces some expression of change which the speaker wishes to convey. This change may indicate that things have taken a turn or that they are not what one would have expected, or that they are about to be different. Sentence particle 了 **le** therefore often occurs naturally with verbs or adjectives that pose contrasts and possess an inherent implication of change.

A As 了 **le** is often used to indicate a change from one state to another, it naturally occurs with adjectival predicates:

天黑了。 **tiān hēi le**
It's getting dark./It's gone dark.

天气暖和起来了。 **tiānqì nuǎnhuo quǐlái le**
It's getting warmer./It's got warmer.

妈妈老了。 **māma lǎo le**
Mother is getting older./Mother is old now.

他的病好了。 **tā de bìng hǎo le**
He's better./He has got better. (*lit.* His illness is better.)

B As 了 **le** is also used to indicate the completion of an action, it readily combines the aspectual use of 了 **le** with the sentential particle 了 **le** following a verb at the end of a statement:

春天到了。 **chūntiān dào le**
Spring has arrived.

冬天过去了。 **dōngtiān guò qù le**
Winter is over.

车来了。 **chē lái le**
Here comes the bus.

车走了。 **chē zǒu le**
The bus has gone.

花开了。 **huā kāi le**
The flowers have opened/are in bloom.

花谢了。 **huā xiè le**
The flowers have withered/fallen.

我的表停了。 **wǒ de biǎo tíng le**
My watch has stopped.

邻居的狗死了。 **línjū de gǒu sǐ le**
The neighbour's dog has died.

C From the discussion in **A** and **B**, it logically follows that **了 le** is generally used after an adjective or a verb (or verb phrase) at the end of a sentence when the speaker sees a situation as having come to a stage which requires comment or summing up:

好了。 **hǎo le**
That's it. (e.g. Some job has been done; some discussion should end, etc.)

(我的话) 完了。 **(wǒ de huà) wán le**
That's all. (*lit.* My words are finished. (e.g. at the end of a speech or talk))

时间到了。 **shíjiān dào le**
Time's up. (*lit.* The time has come.)

算了，算了。 **suàn le | suàn le**
Okay, okay. (e.g. It's no longer worth making a fuss about.)

别生气了。 **bié shēngqì le**
Don't you fret/be angry any more.

不要说话了。 **bù yào shuōhuà le**
Please be quiet. (*lit.* Don't talk any more.)

This usage leads on to the speaker's call for the beginning of a new action:

起床了。 **qǐchuáng le**
Get up, please.

咱们开始了。 **zánmen kāishǐ le**
Let's get started./Let's begin.

D 了 **le** is therefore seen to be frequently used with expressions of imminent action, intention or change, often with adverbs such as 快 **kuài** 'soon', (就) 要 (**jiù**) **yào** 'just about to', etc.:

我走了。 **wǒ zǒu le**
I'm off now.

来了。 **lái le**
I'm coming. (*lit.* come)

(天) 要下雨了。 (**tiān**) **yào xià yǔ le**
It looks like rain.

飞机快起飞了。 **fēijī kuài qǐfēi le**
The plane is about to take off.

火车马上就要开了。 **huǒchē mǎshàng jiù yào kāi le**
The train is just about to start/leave.

E To indicate the end state or result of an action, 了 **le** is commonly used in sentences where the verb incorporates a result complement and once again combines the aspectual use with the sentence particle function (see *Basic Chinese*, Unit 22):

汽车修好了。 **qìchē xiū hǎo le**
The car has been repaired.

衣服烫/熨好了。 **yīfu tàng/yùn hǎo le**
The clothes have been ironed.

一切都准备好了。 **yīqiè dōu zhǔnbèi hǎo le**
Everything is ready.

牛奶喝完了。 **niú'nǎi hē wán le**
The milk is finished.

弟弟长高了。 **dīdì zhǎng gāo le**
My younger brother has grown taller.

爷爷病倒了。 **yéye bìng dǎo le**
Grandpa has fallen ill.

婴儿睡着了。 **yīng'ér shuì zhāo le**
The baby has gone to sleep.

他喝醉了吗？ **tā hē zuì le ma**
Is he drunk?

这个字写错了吧？ **zhè/zhèi gè zì xiě cuò le ba**
I suspect this character has been written wrongly.

Similarly, the direction marker 起来 **qǐlái**, signalling the beginning of a new stage, and potential complements expressing probability or particularly non-probability also require 了 **le**:

那两个喝醉酒的人打起来了。 **nà/nèi liǎng gè hē zuì jiǔ de rén dǎ qǐlái le**
The two people who were drunk came to blows.

我今天走不了了。 **wǒ jīntiān zǒu bu liǎo le**
I can't leave today. (e.g. It's too late and the last train is gone, etc.)

妈妈伤心得说不下去了。 **māma shāngxīn de shuō bu xiàqù le**
Mother was so sad that she could not go on. (*lit.* could not go on talking)

这件事我记不起来了。 **zhè/zhèi jiàn shì wǒ jì bu qǐlái le**
I can't recall this incident. (*lit.* This matter I can't remember.)

F As an indicator of change, 了 **le** may also be used to express the emergence of a situation (present, past or future) which the speaker has not expected or is very much concerned about:

你怎么了？ **nǐ zěnmé le**
What's wrong with you? (Has anything (unusual) happened?)

你去哪儿了？ **nǐ qù nǎr le**
Where did you go? (I could not find you anywhere.)

太好了。 **tài hǎo le**
Terrific! (It's much better than I expected.)

你孩子今年几岁了？ **nǐ hái zi jīn nián jǐ suì le**
How old is your child? (I would really like to know.)

G Sentence 了 **le** naturally often occurs in sentences which include a verb-object or verb-complement phrase marked by aspect 了 **le**. In these cases the speaker, by using sentence 了 **le**, is adding his or her gloss to the statement or question. Consider the following pairs of examples in which the first is a statement of fact and the second adds the speaker's comment:

我们等了两个钟头。 **wǒmen děng le liǎng gè zhōngtóu**

We waited two hours.

我们等了两个钟头了。 **wǒmen děng le liǎng gè zhōngtóu le**

We have been waiting/have waited for two hours.

她去了三次。 **tā qù le sān cì**

She went three times.

她去了三次了。 **tā qù le sān cì le**

She's been there three times.

我们看了那个电影。 **wǒmen kàn le nà/nèi gè diànyǐng**

We saw that film.

我们看了那个电影了。 **wǒmen kàn le nà/nèi gè diànyǐng le**

We've seen that film.

他喝了十杯啤酒。 **tā hē le shí bēi píjiǔ**

He drank ten glasses of beer.

他喝了十杯啤酒了。 **tā hē le shí bēi píjiǔ le**

He's had ten glasses of beer (and that's why he can't stand up).

H 了 **le** is not generally used in the following situations:

(1) In sentences which express processes (past, present or future):

我昨天去看电影。 **wǒ zuótiān qù kàn diànyǐng**

I went to the cinema yesterday.

她正在接电话。 **tā zhèngzài jiē diànhuà**

She is on the phone at the moment. (*lit.* She is receiving a phone call right now.)

我明天去探望他。 **wǒ míngtiān qù tànwàng tā**

I am going to pay him a visit tomorrow.

(2) In sentences expressing habitual actions:

我常常打高尔夫球。 **wǒ chángcháng dǎ gāo'ěrfū qiú**

I often play golf.

我天天坐火车上班。 **wǒ tiāntiān zuò huǒchē shàngbān**

I go to work by train every day.

- (3) In negative sentences indicating that something did not, does not or will not take place:

那天晚上我没有喝酒。 **nà/nèi tiān wǎnshàng wǒ méiyǒu hē jiǔ**
I didn't drink that evening.

我不抽烟。 **wǒ bù chōuyān**
I don't smoke.

我不去。 **wǒ bù qù**
I won't go.

Note: However, *le* can be used in any situation listed under F, if the speaker is expressing an assertion, contradiction or change of mind, etc.:

我没有再喝酒了。 **wǒ méiyǒu zài hē jiǔ le**
I never drank again (after that).

我不抽烟了。 **wǒ bù chōuyān le**
I've given up smoking./I don't smoke any more.

我不去了。 **wǒ bù qù le**
I'm not going any more.

我天天坐火车上班了。 **wǒ tiāntiān zuò huǒchē shàngbān le**
Nowadays I go to work by train every day.
(I didn't use to.)

我昨天去看电影了。 **wǒ zuótiān qù kàn diànyǐng le**
I went to the cinema yesterday.
(I hadn't intended to; I hadn't been before; that's why I was not somewhere else, etc.)

Exercise 8.1

Identify which Chinese sentence in the pairs below is a more accurate translation of the English in each case:

- 1 I can speak Chinese now.

我会说汉语。 **wǒ huì shuō hànyǔ**/我会说汉语了。 **wǒ huì shuō hànyǔ le**

- 2 He doesn't smoke.

他不抽烟。 **tā bù chōuyān**/他不抽烟了。 **tā bù chōuyān le**

- 3 The leaves are going yellow.

树叶黄了。 **shùyè huáng le**/树叶很黄。 **shùyè hěn huáng**

- 4 The shop is closed.

商店关了门。 **shāngdiàn guān le mén**/商店关门了。 **shāngdiàn guān mén le**

- 5 It was cold.

天气很冷。 **tiānqì hěn lěng**/天气冷了。 **tiānqì lěng le**

- 6 He won't go to the library any more.
他不去图书馆了。 **tā bù qù túshūguǎn le**/他不去图书馆。 **tā bù qù túshūguǎn**
- 7 This place has become a supermarket.
这儿是超级市场了。 **zhèr shì chāojí shìchǎng le**/
这儿是超级市场。 **zhèr shì chāojí shìchǎng**
- 8 The kitten has grown very big.
小猫很大。 **xiǎo māo hěn dà**/小猫大了。 **xiǎo māo dà le**

Exercise 8.2

Translate the following sentences into Chinese:

- 1 Here comes the train.
- 2 I have grown taller.
- 3 The watch has been mended.
- 4 The dog is getting old.
- 5 The picture has fallen down. (掉 **diào** 'fall')
- 6 The clock has stopped.
- 7 The fish died.
- 8 The work is finished.
- 9 He is drunk.
- 10 The child is asleep.

Exercise 8.3

Make adjustments to the Chinese sentences below to make them appropriate representations of the English in each case:

- 1 鞋子太大。 **xiézi tài dà**
The shoes are too big.
- 2 我天天喝牛奶了。 **wǒ tiāntiān hē niú'nǎi le**
I drink milk every day.
- 3 我们快到山顶。 **wǒmen kuài dào shāndǐng**
We're nearly at the top of the mountain.
- 4 哥哥经常喝酒了。 **gēge jīngcháng hē jiǔ le**
My elder brother often drinks.
- 5 会议就要结束。 **huìyì jiù yào jiéshù**
The meeting will finish in a minute.
- 6 他喜欢跳舞了。 **tā xǐhuan tiàowǔ le**
He likes dancing.
- 7 我每晚都读报了。 **wǒ měi wǎn dōu dú bào le**
I read the newspaper every evening.

- 8 新房子快造好。 **xīn fángzi kuài zào hǎo**
The new house will be finished very soon.
- 9 水马上就开。 **shuǐ mǎshàng jiù kāi**
The water will boil in a second.
- 10 弟弟是医生了。 **dìdì shì yīshēng le**
My younger brother is a doctor.

Exercise 8.4

Translate the following into Chinese:

- 1 Last year things were very expensive here, but now they are much cheaper.
- 2 We are just off.
- 3 Where have they gone to now?
- 4 I'll be back in a moment.
- 5 I don't like eating meat any more.
- 6 His hair has gone grey.
- 7 She is not here any more.
- 8 It's going to snow.
- 9 I don't have any more money.
- 10 My Chinese is a bit better than it used to be.

UNIT NINE

Abbreviated sentences

A Sentences in Chinese are often dependent on the context for meaning, and abbreviated sentences are therefore extremely common, particularly in speech, since in clearly contextualised utterances some language features can become redundant. Take the following examples:

我买了一个橘子，太酸，没吃。 **wǒ mǎi le yī gè júzi | tài suān | méi chī**
I bought a tangerine, (but it) was too sour, (and I) didn't eat (it).

那家商店还有雨伞卖，这儿卖完了。
nà/nèi jiā shāngdiàn hái yǒu yǔsǎn mài | zhèr mài wán le
There are umbrellas for sale in that shop, (but they) are sold out here.

It will be seen from the above that context in Chinese allows for omissions and that conjunctions and pronouns in particular, especially the third person neuter, are often omitted.

B In answer to questions, abbreviated forms of the initial questions are normally used rather than 'yes' or 'no' (see *Basic Chinese*, Unit 18):

你喝酒吗？ **nǐ hē jiǔ ma**
Do you drink?
喝。 **hē**
Yes. (*lit.* drink)

你抽烟吗？ **nǐ chōuyān ma**
Do you smoke?
不抽。 **bù chōu**
No. (*lit.* don't smoke)

他来了没有？ **tā lái le méiyǒu**
Has he turned up?
来了。 **lái le**
Yes. (*lit.* has come)

你明天去不去游泳？ **nǐ míngtiān qù bù qù yóuyòng**

Are you going swimming tomorrow?

去。 **qù**

Yes. (*lit.* go)

你是不是这儿的服务员？ **nǐ shì bù shì zhèr de fúwùyuán**

Are you a waiter here?

是。 **shì**

Yes. (*lit.* am)

你有没有手电筒？ **nǐ yǒu méi yǒu shǒudiàntǒng**

Have you got a torch?

对不起，没有。 **duìbuqǐ | méi yǒu**

Sorry, no. (*lit.* sorry, haven't got)

If a modal verb is present it should be used in the answer:

你想不想去看电影？ **nǐ xiǎng bù xiǎng qù kàn diànyǐng**

Do you want to go to the cinema?

想。 **xiǎng**

Yes. (*lit.* want)

你要上市场买东西吗？ **nǐ yào shàng shìchǎng mǎi dōngxi ma**

Would you like to go shopping in the market?

不要。 **bù yào**

No. (*lit.* not want)

我能借一下你的打火机吗？ **wǒ néng jiè yíxià nǐ de dǎhuǒjī ma**

May I borrow your lighter for a moment?

能。 **néng**

Yes. (*lit.* may)

In answer to question-word questions, as with most languages it is possible to supply an abbreviated response containing only what is relevant to the question being asked:

她是谁？ **tā shì shéi/shuí**

Who is she?

我的朋友。 **wǒ de péngyou**

My friend.

你有几个孩子？ **nǐ yǒu jǐ gè hái zi**

How many children have you got?

两个。 **liǎng gè**

Two.

这是谁的钱包？ **zhè shì shéi/shuí de qiánbāo**

Whose purse is this?

我的。 **wǒ de**

Mine.

火车什么时候到？ **huǒchē shénme shíhòu dào**

What time is the train due?

下午三点半。 **xiàwǔ sān diǎn bàn**

Half past three in the afternoon.

C In everyday idioms the subject or topic may be omitted:

(1) Everyday expressions:

谢谢！ **xièxie**

Thank you!

对不起！ **duìbuqǐ**

(I'm) sorry!/Excuse me!

再见！ **zàijiàn**

Good-bye!/See you later!

当然喽！ **dāngrán lou**

Of course!

没关系！ **méi guānxi**

It doesn't matter!/Never mind!

行！/好！ **xíng/hǎo**

All right!

找你两毛。 **zhǎo nǐ liǎng máo**

Here's your change of twenty cents. (*lit.* return you two mao)

(2) Expressions about the weather:

下雨了！ **xià yǔ le**

It's raining!

起雾了！ **qǐ wù le**

It's foggy!

下雪了！ **xià xuě le**

It's snowing!

刮风了！ **guā fēng le**

It's windy!

打雷了！ **dǎ léi le**

It's thundering!

闪电了！ **shǎn diàn le**

It's lightning!

下霜了！ **xià shuāng le**

It's frosty!

出太阳了！ **chū tàiyáng le**
The sun has come out!/It's sunny!

Note the use of sentence particle 了 **le** indicating change of state.

(3) Requests or instructions:

过来！ **guò lái**
Come here!
开会了！ **kāihuì le**
Let's start!/We're starting (a meeting).
别动！ **bié dòng**
Don't move!
慢走！ **màn zǒu**
Take care!/Go carefully!
留步！ **liú bù**/不送！ **bù sòng**
Don't bother seeing me to the door!/No need to see me out!
请进！ **qǐng jìn**
Come in please!
请喝茶 **qǐng hē chá?**
Would you like a cup of tea?

(4) Military commands:

立正！ **lì zhèng**
Attention!
稍息！ **shàoxī**
Stand at ease!
齐步走！ **qí bù zǒu**
Quick march!
向右转！ **xiàng yòu zhuǎn**
Right turn!

Note: In these commands the first (or first two) words are often pronounced with a level tone, and the last word always assumes a falling note, no matter what the original tone is.

(5) Public notices of instruction or prohibition:

禁止吸烟！ **jìnzhǐ xīyān**
No smoking!
不准入内！ **bù zhǔn rù nèi**
No entry!
在此排队！ **zài cǐ páiduì**
Queue here!

随手关门! **suíshǒu guān mén**

Close the door behind you!

不准乱扔果皮、纸屑! **bù zhǔn luàn rēng guǒpí | zhǐxiè**

Don't drop litter!/No litter!

(lit. dropping fruit skins and bits of paper not allowed)

拉 **lā**

Pull (notice/sign on door)

推 **tuī**

Push (notice/sign on door)

D In exclamations or instructions a single word or a short phrase is often enough:

票! **piào**

Tickets, please!

火! **huǒ**

Fire!

救命! **jiùmìng**

Help!

注意! **zhùyì**/小心! **xiǎoxīn**

Look out!/Watch out!

蜘蛛! **zhīzhū**

A spider!/A daddy-longlegs!

天哪! **tiān na**

Heavens!/Good heavens!

E Exclamations also often omit the subject or topic and, therefore, consist simply of a qualifying adjective preceded by a degree adverb like 多(么) **duō (me)** 'how', 这么 **zhème** 'so', 真 **zhēn** 'truly', etc.:

多么幸运哪! **duōme xìngyùn na**

How lucky (we are)!

多巧哇! **duō qiǎo wa**

What a coincidence!

这么漂亮啊! **zhème piàoliang à**

How pretty!

真热呀! **zhēn rè ya**

How hot it is!

Sometimes a qualified headword or topic suffices:

多可爱的孩子啊! **duō kě'ài de hái zi a**

What a lovely child!

多凶的狗哇！ **duō xiōng de gǒu wa**
What a fierce dog!
 多好的天气呀！ **duō hǎo de tiānqì ya**
What lovely weather!
 多高的山哪！ **duō gāo de shān na**
What a high mountain!

Exercise 9.1

Translate the following into Chinese:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 I'm sorry! | 8 Sit down, please! |
| 2 It doesn't matter! | 9 Be quiet, please! |
| 3 It's lightning! | 10 No parking! |
| 4 It's thundering! | 11 Turn off the light as you go out! |
| 5 Sign here, please! | 12 Don't cry! |
| 6 Fire! | 13 Your receipt! |
| 7 What a clever person! | 14 What heavy rain! |

Exercise 9.2

Provide positive and negative answers in Chinese for each of the questions below using abbreviated forms:

- 1 昨晚你洗澡了吗？ **zuó wǎn nǐ xǐzǎo le ma**
 Did you have a shower/bath last night?
- 2 你想买杂志吗？ **nǐ xiǎng mǎi zázhì ma**
 Do you want to buy a magazine?
- 3 她是不是你的牙医？ **tā shì bù shì nǐ de yáyī**
 Is she your dentist?
- 4 你有没有擦手纸？ **nǐ yǒu méi yǒu cāshǒuzhǐ**
 Have you got any tissues?
- 5 你写不写回信？ **nǐ xiě bù xiě huíxìn**
 Are you going to write back?
- 6 我可以坐在这儿吗？ **wǒ kěyǐ zuò zài zhèr ma**
 May I sit here?
- 7 你的孩子会走路了吗？ **nǐ de hái zi huì zǒulù le ma**
 Can your child walk now?
- 8 我能请你帮个忙吗？ **wǒ néng qǐng nǐ bāng gè máng ma**
 May I ask a favour?
- 9 你们去过大英博物馆吗？ **nǐmen qù guo dà yīng bó wù guǎn ma**
 Have you been to the British Museum?
- 10 男厕在楼上吗？ **nán cè zài lóu shàng ma**
 Is the Gents upstairs?

Exercise 9.3

Translate the Chinese sentences or expressions below into English:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 随手关门! suìshǒu guān mén | 6 睡觉了! shuìjiào le |
| 2 下课了! xiàkè le | 7 拉 lā |
| 3 赶快! gǎnkuài | 8 推 tuī |
| 4 别说话! bié shuōhuà | 9 出太阳了! chū tàiyáng le |
| 5 滚蛋! gǔndàn | 10 小心! xiǎoxīn |

Exercise 9.4

Translate the following into Chinese, using abbreviations where appropriate:

- 1 That case is very heavy. I don't want to buy it.
- 2 It's raining.
- 3 It's Sunday today.
- 4 Those flowers are beautiful. Can I buy them for you?
- 5 Have you been to Japan? No.
- 6 Are you coming to play football tonight? Yes.
- 7 Our house is on this map, but I can't see it.
- 8 Do you like it here?
- 9 Fancy seeing you here. What a coincidence!
- 10 What beautiful music! (好听 **hǎotīng** pleasant to listen to)
- 11 Do you recognise that man? No.
- 12 I'm looking for my key, but I can't find it.
- 13 The blue one is very attractive, but I can't afford it.
- 14 Can you smoke here? No.
- 15 It's really easy to speak Chinese.

UNIT TEN

Rhetorical questions

A Rhetorical questions by definition are not neutral enquiries and they always carry some degree of assumption on the part of the speaker. In their mildest form they simply repeat the previous statement with a quizzical tone (with or without the interrogative particle 吗 **ma**), implying that the speaker is questioning or expressing doubts about the validity of the statement. This quizzical tone is introduced (1) by stressing particular elements in the question or (2) by adding a qualifying phrase like 真的 **zhēn de**, 确实 **quèshí**, etc. meaning 'Is it true that . . .':

他们同意了(吗)? (with stress on 同意 **tóngyì**)

tāmen tóngyì le (ma)

Have they agreed?

or

他们真的同意了(吗)?

tāmen zhēn de tóngyì le (ma)

Have they really agreed?

你喜欢喝茅台(吗)? (with stress on 茅台 **máotái** – a strong Chinese liquor)

nǐ xǐhuan hē máotái (ma)

You like (drinking) Maotai?

or

你确实喜欢喝茅台(吗)?

nǐ quèshí xǐhuan hē máotái (ma)

Do you really like (drinking) Maotai?

Note: More simply, the speaker may of course just use the simple idiom 是吗? **shì ma** 'Is that so?' to the same effect:

他们同意了, 是吗? **tāmen tóngyì le | shì ma**

They have agreed, haven't they? (*lit.* They have agreed, is that so?)

A stronger form of rhetorical question is couched in the negative where the speaker is actually inviting a positive answer. The interrogative particle 吗 **ma** may be added, but the question can sound even more rhetorical without it:

你不知道 (吗)? **nǐ bù zhīdao (ma)**
Didn't/Don't you know?

他没有告诉你 (吗)? **tā méiyǒu gàosu nǐ (ma)**
Hasn't he told you?

你不喜欢跳舞 (吗)? **nǐ bù xǐhuan tiàowǔ (ma)**
Don't you like dancing?

你不是大夫 (吗)? **nǐ bù shì dàifu (ma)**
Aren't you a doctor?

The negator 不 **bù** can also be followed by the intensifier 是 **shì** before the verb to highlight the whole predicate or comment. Under such circumstances, 吗 **ma** is more often included:

你不是去过美国吗? **nǐ bù shì qù guo měiguó ma**
Haven't you been to America?

你不是说她是俄国人吗? **nǐ bù shì shuō tā shì éguó rén ma**
Didn't you say that she was Russian?

中国话不是有很多不同的方言吗?
zhōngguóhuà bù shì yǒu hěn duō bù tóng de fāngyán ma
Doesn't Chinese have very many different dialects?

他不是把那本小说翻译成英文了吗?
tā bù shì bǎ nà/nèi běn xiǎoshuō fānyì chéng yīngwén le ma
Hasn't he translated that novel into English?

Note: The rhetorical tone may be further strengthened by placing the phrase 难道 **nándào** 'Is it possible/true that . . .' at the beginning of the question or immediately after the subject:

难道你不知道吗? **nándào nǐ bù zhīdao ma**
Do/Did you really not know?

你难道真的不懂中文吗? **nǐ nándào zhēn de bù dǒng zhōngwén ma**
Do you mean to say that you really don't understand Chinese?

B The sentence particle 吧 **ba** also occurs in rhetorical questions. It makes an enquiry which itself suggests the answer:

她是老师吧？ **tā shì lǎoshī ba**
She is a teacher, isn't she?

她不是老师吧？ **tā bù shì lǎoshī ba**
She isn't a teacher, is she?

他们会溜冰吧？ **tāmen huì liūbīng ba**
They know how to skate, don't they?

我们不是明天去见经理吧？ **wǒmen bù shì míngtiān qù jiàn jīnglǐ ba**
We aren't going to see the manager tomorrow, are we?

C Interrogative pronouns like 什么 **shénme**, 哪儿 **nǎr** or 怎么 **zénme** are used in rhetorical questions to convey a more contentious enquiry:

(1) 什么 **shénme**:

(a) Following an adjective:

你忙什么？ **nǐ máng shénme**
What are you so busy with?

你急什么？ **nǐ jí shénme**
What are you so worried about?/There is no hurry./There's nothing to worry about.

这道题难什么？ **zhè/zhèi dào tí nán shénme**
What's so difficult about this question?

(b) Preceding a noun:

吃什么鱼！ **chī shénme yú**
What do you mean (eat) fish?/What fish?
(implies 'There isn't any fish.')

看什么电影！ **kàn shénme diànyǐng**
There is no way you are going to the cinema!

摆什么架子！ **bǎi shénme jiàzi**
You've got nothing to be proud of!/Don't give yourself airs!

(c) After a verb:

你哭什么？ **nǐ kū shénme**
What are you crying for?

你嚷什么？ **nǐ rǎng shénme**

What are you shouting for?/What's all the shouting about?

你埋怨什么？ **nǐ mányuàn shénme**

What are you complaining about?/Why are you making such a fuss?

(d) With the verb 有 **yǒu**:

这有什么用？ **zhè yǒu shénme yòng**

What's the use of (doing) this?

这些书有什么意思？ **zhè/zhèi xiē shū yǒu shénme yìsi**

What's so interesting about these books?

(2) 哪儿 **nǎr** before a noun (with 的 **de**), verb or adjective:

这是哪儿的话？ **zhè shì nǎr de huà**

What sort of talk is that/this? (derogatory)/Don't mention it. (polite)

我哪儿吃得下呢？ **wǒ nǎr chī de xià ne**

How (on earth) can I eat it/any more?

我的话哪儿错了？ **wǒ de huà nǎr cuò le**

What (on earth) is wrong with what I said?

(3) 怎么 **zěnmē** before a verb or modal verb, often followed by 呢 **ne**:

他怎么会不明白呢！ **tā zěnmē huì bù míngbai ne**

How (on earth) can/could he fail to understand?

你怎么能不去呢？ **nǐ zěnmē néng bù qù ne**

How can you not go?

你怎么可以怪她呢！ **nǐ zěnmē kěyǐ guài tā ne**

How can/could you blame her! (implies 'You can't blame her.')

(4) 谁 **shéi/shuí** also usually with 呢 **ne**:

谁知道呢？ **shéi/shuí zhīdao ne**

Who knows? (Nobody knows.)

谁不知道呢？ **shéi/shuí bù zhīdao ne**

Who doesn't know? (Everybody knows.)

谁猜得着呢？ **shéi/shuí cāi de zháo ne**
Who would have guessed it?

还能是谁呢？ **hái néng shì shéi/shuí ne**
Who else could it be (then)?

- (5) 何必 **hébi**/何苦 **hékǔ** 'what need', 'why' or 何不 **hebù** 'why not' again often with 呢 **ne**:

你何必当真呢？ **nǐ hébi dàngzhēn ne**
Why take it (so) seriously?/Why so serious?

你何苦跟自己过不去呢？ **nǐ hékǔ gēn zìjǐ guò bu qù ne**
Why be so hard on yourself?

你何不马上告诉他呢？ **nǐ hebù mǎshàng gàosu tā ne**
Why don't you tell him straightaway?

- (6) 干吗 **gànmá**/干什么 **gàn shénme** 'what(ever) for', 'why (ever)' (colloquial):

你干吗这么客气？ **nǐ gànmá zhème kèqi**
Why are you being so polite?/Why all this formality?

你干什么生气？ **nǐ gàn shénme shēngqì**
Why are you so angry?/What are you so angry for?

你骂人干什么？ **nǐ mà rén gàn shénme**
Why are you being so insulting/abusive?

D Affirmative-negative questions are often used to introduce a rhetorical tone, particularly when introduced by phrases like 你说 **nǐ shuō** (*lit.* 'What do you say to that?'):

你说这件事怪不怪？ **nǐ shuō zhè/zhèi jiàn shì guài bù guài**
Don't you think this is strange?

你说她这个人厉害不厉害？ **nǐ shuō tā zhè/zhèi gè rén lìhài bù lìhài**
She is really tough/formidable isn't she?/Don't you think she is really tough/formidable?

你说这种工作难不难？ **nǐ shuō zhè/zhèi zhǒng gōngzuò nán bù nán**
This is a difficult job isn't it?/Don't you think this is a difficult job?

Exercise 10.1

Rewrite the Chinese sentences below in the form of rhetorical questions using the phrases or structures given in the round brackets, and then translate the resulting question into English. (In some cases the negative may have to be dropped from the original statement.):

- 1 那位运动员很健康。 **nà/nèi wèi yùndòngyuán hěn jiànkāng**
That athlete is very healthy. (... 不是... 吗... **bù shì... ma**)
- 2 他吃过西瓜了。 **tā chī guo xīguā le**
He has eaten watermelon before. (... 没有... 吗... **méiyǒu... ma**)
- 3 那个孩子懂礼貌。 **nà/nèi gè hái zǐ dǒng lǐmào**
The child is very polite. (难道... 不... 吗 **nándào... hù... ma**)
- 4 我没有错。 **wǒ méiyǒu cuò**
I'm not wrong. (... 哪儿... 了... **nǎr... le**)
- 5 他不可说这样的话。 **tā bù kě yǐ shuō zhè/zhèi yàng de huà**
He can't say things like that. (... 怎么... **... zénme...**)
- 6 大家都知道这件事。 **dàjiā dōu zhīdào zhè/zhèi jiàn shì**
Everyone knows about this. (谁不... **shéi/shuí bù...**)
- 7 你可以跟他一起去美国。 **nǐ kě yǐ gēn tā yìqǐ qù měiguó**
You can go to America with him. (... 何不... 呢... **hébù... ne**)
- 8 这件事情真复杂。 **zhè/zhèi jiàn shì qing zhēn fùzá**
This matter is really complicated. (你说... 不... 吗 **nǐ shuō... bù... ma**)
- 9 她不应该生气。 **tā bù yīng gāi shēng qì**
She shouldn't be angry. (... 干什么... **gàn shénme**)
- 10 他是王工程师。 **tā shì wáng gōngchéngshī**
He's Wang the engineer. (难道... 不是... **nándào... bù shì...**)

Exercise 10.2

Translate the following into English:

- 1 你不爱吃巧克力吗？ **nǐ bù ài chī qiǎokè lì ma**
- 2 你何苦住这样旧的房子呢？ **nǐ hé kǔ zhù zhè/zhèi yàng jiù de fáng zi ne**
- 3 谁买这么贵的汽车呢？ **shéi/shuí mǎi zhè me guì de qì chē ne**
- 4 哭有什么用呢？ **kū yǒu shén me yòng ne**
- 5 你怎么做这样危险的事呢？
nǐ zěn me zuò zhè/zhèi yàng wēi xiǎn de shì ne
- 6 他难道不高兴吗？ **tā nán dào bù gāo xìng ma**
- 7 这么说不对吗？ **zhè me shuō bù duì ma**
- 8 你说这件事复杂不复杂？ **nǐ shuō zhè/zhèi jiàn shì fù zá bù fù zá**
- 9 还有什么比这个更便宜的吗？
hái yǒu shén me bǐ zhè/zhèi gè gèng pián yi de ma
- 10 你懂什么？ **nǐ dǒng shén me**

Exercise 10.3

Translate the following into Chinese:

(a) Using 不 **bù** ... 吗 **ma**, 真的 **zhēn de**, etc.:

- 1 Don't you understand?
- 2 Do you really watch television every evening?
- 3 Have your friends really all arrived?
- 4 Do you really want to go?
- 5 Can't you use chopsticks?

(b) Using 不是 **bù shì** ... 吗 **ma**:

- 6 Didn't you say they could all speak Chinese?
- 7 Haven't you seen that film?
- 8 Isn't she very like her mother?
- 9 Aren't you extremely busy on Saturdays?
- 10 Isn't Shanghai the biggest city in China?

(c) Using 难道 **nándào** ... 吗 **ma**:

- 11 You haven't left your tickets at home, have you?
- 12 Do you mean to say you still can't write that (Chinese) character?
- 13 Didn't he even say 'thank you'?
- 14 Could it be possible that she doesn't eat tomatoes?

(d) Using the question word indicated:

- 15 What's the hurry? (什么 **shénme**)
- 16 How can she help you? (哪儿 **nǎr**)
- 17 How could he possibly agree with your opinions? (怎么 **zénme**)
- 18 Why won't she say anything? (干吗 **gànmá**)
- 19 Who would buy such expensive things? (谁 **shéi/shuí** ... 呢 **ne**)
- 20 Why not go by train then? (何不 **hébù** ... 呢 **ne**)