

Unit 2

Yù bù zhuó, bù chéng qì.
jade not carve, not become implement

A saying, in classical style, conveying the importance of discipline and perseverance in achieving success. The root meaning of qì (器) is a ‘vessel’, ie something that can be put to use. Its extended meanings include ‘utensils’, and ‘talent’.

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2.1 Pronunciation

As before, to set the articulatory positions of your mouth and tongue for Chinese speech, contrast the following sets of Chinese and English words:

a)	lèi	lay	b)	lái	lie	c)	chū	chew
	méi	May		shāi	shy		shū	shoo
	zhèi	Jay		mài	my		shén	shun
	bēi	bay		pái	pie		zhuō	jaw
	péi	pay		bái	buy		zhōu	Joe
	fēi	Fay					shòu	show
d)	dízi	deeds	xízi	seeds				
	tóuzi	toads	qíci	cheats				
	luózi	lords	bǐci	beets (or beats)				

2.2 Adverbs

In the first unit, you were introduced to a number of words that are classed ‘adverbs’: hěn, bù, yě, hái or háishì and yǐjīng. It is difficult to characterize the general function of adverbs beyond rather abstract notions like ‘degree’, ‘amount’, or ‘manner’; but they can be defined positionally as words that are placed before, and are semantically linked to, a following verb (or other adverb).

2.2.1 *Tài with le*

Tài, seen only in negative sentences in the first unit (bú tài le), is also common in positive sentences, where it is frequently found with a final le: Tài hǎo le. ‘Great!’; Tài jǐnzhāng le. ‘[I]’m real anxious!’; Tài nán le. ‘[It]’s too difficult!’ Le in this context conveys a sense of excess (cf. English ‘exceedingly’), and as such, can be regarded as a special case of the notion of ‘new situation’. Notice that negative sentences with tài often suggest moderation rather than excess, so do not attract final le in the same way: bú tài hǎo.

2.2.2 *Other adverbs*

Below are examples of some additional common adverbs: dōu ‘all’, gèng ‘even more’, bǐjiào (pronounced bǐjiào by some) ‘rather; quite; fairly’, and zǒngshì ‘always’.

dōu ‘all’	Tāmen dōu hěn è. Dōu duì. Dōu méi chī ne.	[They]’re all hungry. [They]’re all right. None [of them] has eaten [yet].
gèng ‘even more’	Xiànzài hěn lěng, kěshì yǐqián gèng lěng.	[It]’s cold now, but [it] was even colder before.
bǐjiào ‘quite’	Wǒ jīntiān bǐjiào máng. Zuótiān bǐjiào rè.	I’m fairly busy today. Yesterday was fairly warm.
zǒngshì ‘always’	Xuéshēng zǒngshì hěn máng hěn lèi; dànsī lǎoshī gèng máng gèng lèi.	Students are always busy and tired, but teachers are even more so.

2.2.3 *Intensifying or backing off*

a) *Fēicháng* ‘very; especially; unusually’

Rather than answering a *yes-no question* about a state with a neutral positive response (Nǐ lèi ma? / Hěn lèi.), you may want to intensify your answer. Fēicháng, an adverb whose literal meaning is ‘not-often’, is one of a number of options:

Jīntiān fēicháng rè!	[It]’s really hot today.
Fēicháng hǎo!	[It]’s unusually good!

b) *ADVs tǐng and mán ~ mǎn as intensifiers*

Some mention needs to be made here of two adverbs that are very common in certain phrases in colloquial speech. One is tǐng, whose core meaning is actually ‘straight; erect’, but which, as an ADV, carries the force of English ‘very’ or ‘really’. The other is mán, which has a variant in low tone, mǎn. The variants may reflect confusion between two different roots, one, mán, with a core meaning of ‘fierce’ and an adverbial meaning of ‘entirely; utterly’; and the other mǎn, with a core meaning of ‘full’, extended to ‘very; full’ in the adverbial position. The distinction may have been obscured in part by the fact that the two merge to mán when the low-tone rule applies in common phrases such as

mán hǎo. For whatever reason, they seem to be treated as synonymous in colloquial speech by many speakers.

Exclamations with mǎn or tǐng often occur with a final de (written with the same character as possessive de, 的, and sometimes referred to as *situational-de*):

Tǐng hǎo de.	Perfect; great!
Mán hǎo de.	[That]’s great!

Here are some common collocations, roughly glossed to convey the tone of the Chinese; mán is given in rising tone, but you may find that speakers from Taiwan and parts of southern China tend to say mǎn in contexts where the low tone is permitted.

Tǐng bú cuò de.	Not bad!
Tǐng shūfu.	[It]’s quite comfortable.
Tǐng yǒu yìsi de!	How interesting!
Mán hǎochī de!	[It]’s delicious!
Mán piàoliang.	[She]’s real attractive.
Mán bú cuò de!	[That]’s pretty darn good!
Mán bú zàihu.	[He] doesn’t give a damn. (‘to care; be concerned’)

c) *-jīle* ‘extremely’

Another option is the intensifying suffix -jīle, which follows SVs directly (and is therefore not an adverb). Jīle is a compound of jí ‘the extreme point’ or ‘axis’ (cf. Běijí ‘North Pole’), plus le. It is quite productive and can follow almost any SV to mean ‘extremely SV’.

Hǎo jíle!	Excellent!
Tiānqì rè jíle!	The weather’s extremely hot!

d) *Yǒu <yì>diǎnr* ‘kind of; a bit’

Rather than intensifying your answer, you may want to back off and answer ‘kind of; rather; a bit’. The construction is yǒu <yì>diǎnr + SV ‘(have a-bit SV)’, a phrase that appears in the adverbial slot and can be interpreted as a complex adverb. The yì of <yì>diǎnr is often elided (hence the <>). Taiwan and other southern Mandarin regions, where the final ‘r’ is not usual, say yǒu yìdiǎnr SV. Like the English ‘a bit’, this construction conveys some sort of inadequacy. So tā yǒu yìdiǎnr gāo ‘he’s a bit tall’ suggests that his height is problematical. [Note the presence of yǒu ‘have’ in the Chinese, with no direct correspondence in the English equivalent!]

Wǒ jīntiān yǒu (yì)diǎnr máng.	I’m kind of busy today.
Jīntiān yǒu (yì)diǎnr rè.	It’s rather hot today.
Wǒmen yǒu (yì)diǎnr è.	We’re a bit hungry

Summary of Adverbs (and other expressions of degree)

<i>ADV</i>	<i>~Eng equivalent</i>	<i>with SVs</i>	<i>with V_{act}</i>
bù	not	bú lèi	bú shàngbān
yě	too; also	yě hěn lèi	yě chī le
hái ~ háishi	still	hái hǎo háishi hěn lèi	hái méi zǒu ne
dōu	all	dōu hěn gāo	dōu shuìjiào le
yǐjīng	already		yǐjīng zǒu le
tài	very; too	tài máng le; bú tài máng	
hěn	very	hěn lèi	
tǐng, mǎn ~ mǎn	very; really	mǎn bú cuò	
gèng	even more	gèng rè	
bǐjiào ~ bǐjiào	rather; relatively	bǐjiào lěng	
zǒngshì	always	zǒngshì hěn máng	
fēicháng	extremely; very	fēicháng lěng	

<i>SPECIAL CONSTRUCTIONS</i>	<i>~Eng equivalent</i>	<i>with SVs</i>	<i>with V_{act}</i>
jíle	‘very; extremely’	hǎo jíle	
yǒu<yì> diǎn<r>	‘kind of; rather; a bit’	yǒu diǎnr guì	

2.2.4 Conjunctions

Conjunctions are words that conjoin linguistic units, either as equal partners, as in the case of ‘and’ or ‘but’ (called ‘coordinating conjunctions’), or in a skewed partnership, as in the case of ‘if’ and ‘because’ (called ‘subordinating conjunctions’). In Chinese, there is no word quite comparable to English ‘and’ that connects sentences; that function is often served by the adverb, yě:

Zuótiān wǒ bù shūfu, jīntiān yě bú tài hǎo. I wasn’t very well yesterday,
and [I]’m not too well today,
either.

Zuótiān hěn rè, jīntiān yě hěn rè. It was hot yesterday, and it’s
hot today, too.

As noted in §1.7.5, conjunctions kěshì and dànshì (the latter probably more common in non-northern regions) correspond to English ‘but’ or ‘however’. A third word, búguò, can also be mentioned here; though its range of meaning is broader than that of the other two, it has considerable overlap with them and can also often be translated as ‘but; however’.

Tāmen hái méi chīfàn, kěshì dōu bú è.	They haven't eaten, but they aren't hungry.
Wǒ chīfàn le, dànshi hái méi xǐzǎo.	I've eaten, but I haven't bathed yet.
Tā zǒu le, búguò jīntiān bú shàngbān.	She's left, but she's not going to work today.
<i>cf.</i> Tā zǒu le, búguò jīntiān méi shàngbān.	She's gone, but she didn't go to work today.

2.3 More SVs

Here are some additional SVs that can be incorporated in the patterns introduced in the first two units.

Of people

yán 'strict' lihai 'formidable; tough'

Of tasks

nán 'difficult' róngyì 'easy'

Of things

hǎochī 'nice
[to eat]' hǎotīng 'nice
[sounding]' guì 'expensive'

Of people or things

qīngchū 'clear' hǎokàn 'nice [looking]' piàoliang 'pretty'

qíguài 'strange; odd; surprising'

Of situations

xíng 'be okay; be satisfactory; [it'll] do'

Several of these SVs can be applied to people such as lǎoshī 'teachers' and xuésheng 'students'; others, as noted, are more like to apply to things such as Zhōngwén 'Chinese language' or dōngxi '[physical] things'.

2.3.1 Questions with zěnmeyàng 'how [is it]'

The question word zěnmeyàng (pronounced [zěmeyàng], without the first 'n') is used to ask questions corresponding to 'how is X'. Zěnmeyàng is also used as an informal greeting, rather like English 'how's it going'.

Jīntiān zěnmeyàng? <i>Hěn rè.</i>	How is [it] today? <i>[It]'s hot.</i>
Zhōngwén zěnmeyàng? <i>Hěn nán! Lǎoshī hěn yán.</i>	How's Chinese [class]? <i>[It]'s difficult. The teacher's strict.</i>

2.3.2 Examples

Lǎoshī zěnmeyàng? <i>Hěn lìhài, tā fēicháng yán.</i>	How's the teacher? <i>[She]'s formidable; she's really strict.</i>
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Tā zěnmeyàng? Hěn lèi, shuǐjiào le.	How is he? [He]’s tired, [he]’s gone to bed.
Tāmen zěnmeyàng? Bù shūfu, méi shàngkè.	How are they doing? [They]’re not well, [they] weren’t in class.
Zhōngwén zěnmeyàng? Bù nán yě bù róngyì.	What’s Chinese like? [It]’s not difficult, nor is [it] easy.
Zěnmeyàng? Hǎochī ma? Hái kěyǐ. Guì bu guì? Bú tài guì, hái xíng.	How is [it]? Good? [It]’s okay. Is [it] expensive? Not too – [it]’s reasonable.
Tiānqì zěnmeyàng? Zuótiān fēicháng lěng, kěshì jīntiān hǎo le.	How’s the weather? Yesterday was very cold, but today’s okay.

2.3.3 Juéde ‘feel; think’

Zěnmeyàng may be combined with, or may elicit the verb juéde ‘feel; think’ to form a more specific question about internal states:

Xiànzài nǐ juéde zěnmeyàng?	How do you feel now?
Wǒ juéde bù shūfu.	I’m not feeling well.
Wǒ hěn jǐnzhāng.	I’m nervous.
Wǒ juéde hěn lèi.	I feel quite tired.
Hái xíng.	Okay.

2.3.4 Zěnmeyàng as a greeting

Responses to zěnmeyàng as an informal greeting include the following:

Zěnmeyàng?	Hái hǎo.	[I]’m fine.
	Hái xíng.	[I]’m okay. (still alright)
	Hái kěyǐ.	Passable. (still be+possible)
	Bú cuò.	Not bad. (not be+erroneous)
	Māma-hūhū.	So-so.
	Lǎo yàngzi.	The usual. (old way)

Notes

- Kěyǐ is a verb meaning ‘may; be acceptable’.
- Cuò is a SV meaning ‘be wrong; be mistaken’.
- Māma-hūhū is a complex SV that is formed by repetition of the parts of the SV mǎhu ‘be casual; careless’.

Exercise 1.

Perform a dialogue between the two students, *Máo Dàwéi* and *Lǐ Lìsān*, along the following lines:

Máo Dàwéi

Hi, *Lìsān*!

Tired. How about you?

No, I already ate.

It was okay. How're your teachers? Strict?

But Japanese is even harder.

Okay, see you later.

Lǐ Lìsān

Hello, *Dàwéi*. How're you feeling today?

I'm a bit tired too – I still haven't eaten. How about you – hungry?

Was it good?

Very, they're formidable! Chinese is tough!

They're both hard! ... Well, I must be off.

Okay, bye, take it easy.