

Mermaid construction in Mandarin Chinese

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Mermaid construction in Mandarin Chinese

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1. Introduction

The present chapter presents a very brief summary of the mermaid construction ('MMC') of Mandarin Chinese. This language has the SVO order, unlike most of the languages reported in the present volume. Nonetheless, it has what may be considered a variant of the MMC.

2. Nouns

The following nouns can occur in the 'Noun' slot of the MMC.

yàngzi 'appearance, expressions', *yuángù* 'reason, circumstance', *pìqì* 'nature, character', *déxìng* 'bad attitude', *jiàshi* 'posture, arrogance'

All of these nouns are independent words. But when they occur in the MMC, they are generally grammaticalized and have an evidential meaning, a modal meaning or the like.

The MMC of Mandarin Chinese has the structure shown in (1) or that shown in (2).

- (1) Subject + Copula + Clause + Noun.
- (2) Subject (Clause-1) + Copula + Clause-2 + Noun.

In the structure shown in (1), the 'Clause' does not have its own subject. That is, it is possible to say that the subject of the 'Clause' is separated by the 'Copula' from the other constituents of the 'Clause'. Examples include (3), and (5) to (7). In the structure presented in (2), the first clause (i.e. Clause-1) is the subject of the entire sentence. Examples include (4).

3. Examples of the mermaid construction

One example of each noun that can occur in the 'Noun' slot of the MMC is given below. As these examples show, the MMC of Mandarin Chinese may express evidentiality ('X seems/looks ...'), e.g. (3), reason ('This is because ...'), e.g. (4), a person's nature, personality, propensity ('X has been ..'), e.g. (5), (6), and a person's attitude, e.g. (7).

(3) Dàijiā dōu shì sōng-le yì kǒu qì
everyone all COP relax-ASP one CL breath
 Subject Copula Clause (continued)
de yàngzi.
PART appearance
 Clause Noun

LT: 'Everyone was an appearance such that [they] were relieved.'

FT: 'Everyone seemed to be relieved/looked relieved.'

(4) Féng Qìng cóng xiǎo biàn zhǎng-de
Feng Qing from young already grow-PART
 Subject (Clause-1) (continued)
xìgāo jīngshòu,
tall.and.slender thin
 Subject (Clause-1)

dàgài shì chī fàn
 probably COP eat meal
 Copula Clause-2 (continued)

shǐzhōng méi yǒu wèikǒu de yuángù.
throughout NEG have appetite PART reason
 Clause-2 Noun

LT: 'That Feng Qing has been tall, thin and pretty skinny since he was a child is probably a reason such that [he] has never had a [good] appetite.'

FT: 'Feng Qing has been tall, thin and pretty skinny since he was a child, and this is probably because he has never had a [good] appetite.'

(5) Tā cóng xiǎo jiù shì yì fū
3SG from young already COP one CL
 Subject Copula Clause (continued)
tiān bú pà dì bú pà de
heaven NEG fear earth NEG fear PART
 Clause

píqi.
nature
 Noun

LT: 'He is a nature such that [he] has not feared the heaven or the earth since he was a child.'

FT: 'He has been afraid of nothing since he was a child.'

(6) Tā cóng xiǎo jiù shì yì fū
3SG from young already COP one CL
 Subject Copula Clause (continued)
lǎolao bù qīn jiùjiu bú ài de
grandmother NEG kiss uncle NEG love PART
 Clause

déxing.

bad.attitude

Noun

LT: 'He is a bad attitude such that [his] grandmother did not kiss [him] and [his] uncle did not love [him] since [he] was a child.'

FT: 'He has been disliked by others since he was a child.'

(7)	<i>Tā</i>	<i>xiànzài</i>	<i>wánquán</i>	<i>shì</i>	<i>yí</i>	<i>fū</i>	<i>yào</i>
	3SG	now	completely	COP	one	CL	will
	Subject			Copula Clause (continued)			
	<i>bǎ</i>	<i>huángdì</i>	<i>lā-xià</i>	<i>mǎ</i>	<i>de</i>		
	CAUS	emperor	pull-down	horse	PART		
	Clause						

jiàshi.

arrogant.manner

LT: 'He is now completely an arrogant manner such that [he] will make the emperor pull down horses.'

FT: 'Now, he is now totally arrogant enough to attempt to topple the emperor.'

Adnominal clauses, i.e. clauses that modify nouns, in Mandarin Chinese end with the particle *de*, and in this respect the 'Clause' of the MMC resembles adnominal clauses. This fact is reflected in the literal translations ('LT') given above.

Abbreviations

ASP - aspect marker; CAUS - causative; CL - classifier; COP - copula; FT - free translation; LT - literal translation; MMC - mermaid construction; NEG - negation; PART - particle; SG - singular; 3 - third person.