

9.6 Dialogue: buying a seal

Seals, made of stone, jade, etc. are sold from street stands, in specialty shops and in department stores. When you buy, you select a blank first, then the characters are engraved in either standard script, or more often, in small seal script (xiǎozhuàn).

- | | | |
|------|---|---|
| Jiǎ: | Nèi ge túzhāng néng kànkān ma? | Can I take a look at that seal? |
| Yǐ: | Nǐ shuō de shì zhèi ge ma? | You talking about this one? |
| Jiǎ: | Bù, nèi ge fāng fāng de. | No, that square one. |
| Yǐ: | Zhèi ge ma? | This one? |
| Jiǎ: | Ng. Kànkān kěyǐ ma? | M hm. Can I take a look? |
| Yǐ: | Méi wèntí! | By all means! |
| Jiǎ: | Shi yù zuò de ma? | Is it made of jade? |
| Yǐ: | <i>Bú shì! Yù hěn guì!</i>
<i>Shì shítou de, dàlǐshí de.</i> | <i>No, it's not jade. Jade's expensive!</i>
<i>It's stone, marble.</i> |

- Jiǎ: Nà, duōshao qián? So, how much?
 Yǐ: Èrshíwǔ kuài. ¥25.
 Jiǎ: Nà yàoshi kè zì hái yào qián ma? Is it extra if you engrave characters?
 Yǐ: Yí ge zì wǔ kuài qián. It's ¥5 a character.
 Jiǎ: Néng piányi diǎnr ma? Can you make it a bit less?
 Wǒ yào kè sān ge zì. I need 3 characters engraved.
 Yǐ: Nà, shí'èr kuài. Yígòng sānshíqī kuài. Okay, ¥12. ¥37 all together.
 Jiǎ: Sānshíwǔ ba! ¥35!
 Yǐ: Ng, hǎo, sānshíwǔ. Hm, okay, ¥35.
 Jiǎ: Hǎo, jiu zhèiyàng ba. Okay, that's it then.

gōngyì: 'handicrafts' etc.

M-word

zìhuà	scrolls (character-picture)	zhāng
huāpíng	vases (flower-bottle)	gè
shànzi	fans	bǎ (hand fan)
ěrhuan	(ear-rings)	duì (pair); zhī (one of pair)
xiàngliàn	necklace (nape-chain)	tiáo
màozi	hat	dǐng
yùdiāo	jade carving	gè
yádiāo	ivory carving	gè

shapes and textures

yuán <yuán> de	round
cū <cū> de	rough
guānghuá de	smooth

material

sùliào de	plastic	shítou de	stone
mùtòu de	wooden	xiàngyá de	ivory (elephant-tooth)
zhēnsī de	[real] silk	zhǐ de	paper
bù de	cloth	jīnzi de	gold
yínzi de	silver	qīngtóng de	bronze (green copper)



Seals for sale, Tianjin.

9.7 The Bǎ (把) construction

In Chinese, shifting the position of objects – things affected or effected by the verb – may produce subtle shifts in meaning that are either achieved in other ways in English, or not explicitly acknowledged at all. For example, in some cases the object (the thing affected – the window – in the following example) may follow the verb, much as in English:

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | Qǐng dǎkāi chuānghu.
<i>Yǐjīng dǎkāi le.</i> | Open a window please. [any window]
<i>[I] already have.</i> |
|---|---|--|

Here the speaker is not designating a specific window – any window will do. But if the speaker wants to indicate a specific window, then he is more likely to say:

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 2 | Qǐng bǎ chuānghu dǎkāi.
<i>Wǒ yǐjīng bǎ tā dǎkāi le.</i> | Please open the window. [a specific one]
<i>[I]’ve already opened it.</i> |
|---|---|--|

Instructions that involve manipulation of particular items almost always elicit the grammatical word bǎ (把) [or its more formal counterpart, jiāng (將/将)]. Bǎ, which derives from a verb meaning ‘to take’, serves to spotlight a following phrase referring to an item that is to be moved, taken, broken, prepared, hidden, painted, purged, promoted or otherwise affected or changed in some way. For that reason, bǎ is typically associated with verb-combos (action plus result), or at very least, verb-le (action done) or a reduplicated verb (qiēqiē ‘cut up’). For the same reason, bǎ is not elicited by verbs like xǐhuan or kàn, which do not have a similar effect on their objects:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Wǒ hěn xǐhuan nèi bù diànyǐng. | I love that movie! [no <u>bǎ</u>] |
| Wǒ yǐjīng kànwán-le nèi běn shū. | I’ve finished reading the book. [no <u>bǎ</u>] |

Nor does bǎ appear with potential verb combos, for which the effect is not actual, only imagined:

8. Qǐng bǎ zìxíngchē fàng zài xiǎoxiàng lǐ le. Please put your bike in the alley.
[with *le* marking a ‘change of state’]
- Fàng zài xiǎoxiàng lǐ gòu ānquán ma? Will it be safe enough if I put it there?
- Méi wènti, wǒ huì bāng nǐ kān-zhe. No problem, I’ll help you to keep an eye on it.

Notes

- a) Example 8 suggests how the sense of the modern function and properties of *bǎ* can be adduced from *ba*’s original function as a verb meaning ‘take’, ie from ‘Take your bicycle and put it in the alley’ to ‘put your bicycle in the alley’.
- b) Note kān-zhe, with level tone on kān when it means ‘tend; watch over’ (still written 看), eg kān háizi ‘babysit children’.

As a vestige of its verbal origins, bǎ can be directly negated or modified by adverbs:

- Tā méi bǎ chuānghu dǎkāi. She didn’t open the windows.
- Tāmen yǐjīng bǎ dōngxi nǎzǒu le. They’ve already taken the things out.
- Bié bǎ shūbāo fàng zai zhuōzi shàng. Don’t put [your] bookbags on the table.

9.7.1 Making tea

Instructions are a prototypical site for *ba*-phrases, because instructions involve picking particular objects from a set and doing things with them. Here, for example, are instructions for making a cup of tea. The master brewer makes reference to the following items:

shuǐ shuǐhú huǒ chábēi chányè hé bēizi gàizi
water kettle fire teacup tea leaves box cup top; a cover

And then performs the following operations on them – all of which involve complex verbs (or in one case, a verb followed by a *zai*-phrase).

dàojìn fàng zài shāokāi zhǔnbèihǎo náchūlai fàngjìn gàishàng
pour-in put in boil-open prepare-well take-out put-in cover-on

And (s)he instructs as follows:

Bǎ shuǐ dàojìn shuǐhú lǐ, bǎ shuǐhú fàng zài huǒ shàng, bǎ shuǐ shāokāi.
Ránhòu bǎ chábēi zhǔnbèihǎo, bǎ chányè cóng chányèhé lǐ náchūlai, fàngjìn

chábēi lǐ, bǎ shāokāi le de shuǐ dào jìn bēizi lǐ, ránhòu bǎ bēizi de gàizi
gàishàng; liǎng fēn zhōng yǐhòu nǐ jiù kěyǐ hē le.

Notes

Dào jìn ‘pour-into’ and fàng jìn ‘put-into’ are both followed by places: dào jìn shuǐhú lǐ; fàng jìn chábēi lǐ. In such cases lái or qù is either postponed until after the place (dào jìn shuǐhú lǐ qù), or as here, simply omitted.

Exercise 4

Paraphrase the following in Chinese:

It’s rather late – almost time for dinner. In the living room, there are a couple of students sitting on the sofa, one tall with blond hair, one short with black; both are wearing glasses. In front of them is a table; and laid out on the table are a set of boxes (yí tào hézi) of different colors (bù tóng yánsè) and different sizes (bù tóng dàxiǎo). The tall guy picks up the largest red box and puts the smaller yellow one inside it. Then the shorter guy picks up the green box and puts it in the yellow one. When they’ve finished putting all the boxes (suǒyǒu de hézi) back, they stand up, and walk out. That’s it! Nothing else.

9.8 Verb Combos (3)

The topic of *bǎ* is, as noted, intimately connected to complex verbs, so this is an appropriate place to continue the complex verb survey. First a review exercise.

Exercise 5

Fill in the gaps below with one of the listed verb complements (actual or potential – the latter with inserted bù or de): wán and hǎo ‘finish’, dào and zhào ‘manage to; succeed in’, bǎo ‘filled’, and cuò ‘in error’.

1. Kèrén yào lái le, nǐ fàn zuò _____ le méiyǒu?
2. Nǐ zhǎo nǐ wèi? / Duìbuqǐ, wǒ yěxǔ dǎ _____ le.
3. Tā shuō de huà nǐ tīng _____ ma?
4. Téng lǎoshī zài chuānghu wàitōu, nǐ méi kàn _____ tā ma?
5. Nèi běn shū tài cháng le, wǒ kàn _____ .
6. Wǒ xiǎngdào kǎoshì de shìqíng jiù shuì _____ jiào!
7. Tā xiǎng zuò de shì yǐjīng zuò _____ le.
8. Wǒ de zìdiǎn zhǎo _____ ! Nǐ kàn _____ le ma? Méiyǒu zìdiǎn bù néng zuò jīntiān de gōngkè!
9. Bié kèqì, duō chī yìdiǎnr cài! / Ài, wǒ chī _____ le, bù néng zài chī le!
10. Jīntiān hěn mēn, kàn _____ tàiyáng!

9.8.1 Position of objects

As noted earlier, bǎ is associated with manipulation or other kinds of actions that affect the position or integrity of objects:

Tā bǎ bǐ náqǐlai le.	She picked up the pen.
Tā bǎ huà náxiàlai le.	He lifted the painting down.

However, an indefinite object (one that is new to the discourse – and in English typically preceded by an ‘indefinite article’ such as ‘a~an’ or ‘some’) often appears after the verb combination. Lái and qù, whose function is to indicate direction towards or away from the speaker, are often – but not always – postponed until after the object.

Tā náqǐ bǐ lai le.	She picked up a pen.
Wǒ xiǎngbuqǐ tā de míngzi [lai] le.	I can’t remember his name.

9.8.2 More verb complements

a) Zhù, which as a verb means ‘live’, combines with verbs such as jì ‘note’, ná ‘hold’, and tíng ‘stop’ to convey permanence:

Tā de diànhuà hàomǎ wǒ lǎo jìbuzhù!	I can never remember his phone number.
Tā hěn cōngmíng, nǐ wèn buzhù tā!	He’s smart, you won’t stump him!
Názhù le ma?	Got it?
Wǒ ná buzhù!	I can’t hold it!
Jiēzhù! / Jiēzhù le!	Catch it! / Got it!
Zhànzhù, bú yào dòng! Jǔqǐ shǒu lai!	Stay still, don’t move. Put your hands up!

Notes

- Wèn buzhù, literally ‘ask-not-stick’; or wèn budǎo ‘ask-not-collapse’.
- Jiē ‘join’, as in Xièxie nǐmen lái jiē wǒmen.
- Dòng ‘move’, yùndòng de dòng.
- Jǔ ‘raise’; cf jǔzhòng ‘lift weights’ or jǔxíng ‘take place’. For ‘put your hands up’, a version with bǎ is also possible: Bǎ shǒu jǔqǐlai!

b) Kāi as a verb complement means ‘open’:

Kāibukāi ~ dǎbukāi chuānghu.	I can’t open the window.
Zǒukāi! Zhèr méiyǒu nǐ de shìr.	Get lost; this doesn’t concern you.

Yú líbukāi shuǐ ya, guā líbukāi yāng; rénmin qúnzhòng líbukāi gòngchǎndǎng!	Fish can't leave the water, melons can't leave the vine; the people can't be separated from the Communist Party!
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c) Shàng and xià, in addition to their literal meanings in the directional complements xiàlai and shànglai, xiàqu and shàngqu, also form single syllable complements:

Bǎ qiāng fàngxià!	Put the gun down!
Zhèi jiān jiàoshì zuòbuxià sānshí ge rén.	This classroom won't seat 30.
Zuòxià ba.	Why don't you sit down.
Wǒ wàng le dàishàng biǎo.	I forgot to put my watch on.
Tā pà tā kǎobushàng dàxué.	He's afraid he won't pass the university entrance exam.
Tā zhēn kě'ài; wǒ yǐjīng àishàng tā le!	She's so cute; I've already fallen in love with her!
Xiāngzi tài xiǎo le, fāngbuxià dōngxi.	This case's too small; I can't get the things in.

d) Zǒu 'leave' appears as a complement meaning 'away':

Tāmen yǐjīng bānzǒu le.	They've already moved away [from here].
Shéi bǎ wǒ de yàoshi nǎzǒu le?	Who's gone off with my keys?
Dōngtiān lái le, niǎo dōu fēizǒu le. <i>Méi guānxi, niǎo shì sìhài zhīyī, zǒu jiu zǒu ba.</i>	Winter's here, and the birds have all flown. <i>Never mind, birds are one of the 4 pests, [if] they've gone, they've gone.</i>

9.8.3 Specialized forms

a) A number of complements appear only in the potential form. Qǐ – qǐlái de qǐ – is one. As a complement, it shows a considerable shift in meaning to 'worthy of' or 'afford to':

Duìbùqǐ.	Sorry. ('face-not-worthy')
Aiya, xiànzài Běijīng de shēnghuó fèiyong tài gāo le, wǒ kě zhùbuqǐ!	Gosh the cost of living in Beijing is too high – I can't afford to live here.

Yànwō, yúchì zhèi lèi de dōngxī Things like birds nest soup and shark fin
tài guì le; wǒ chībūqǐ! are too expensive; I can't afford to eat them.

b) It is also possible to choose to use the potential framework but not to commit to a particular complement. In such case, a default complement, liǎo (written with the same character as le, 了) is available. Unlike most of the other verb complements, it combines with almost any action verb. It usually suggests 'more than one can be expected to do':

Dōngxī tài duō le, wǒ yí ge rén [I have] too many things; how can I carry
zěnme nàdeliǎo ne? them all by myself?
Wǒ lái bāng nǐ ná ba. *Let me help you.*

Zhème duō cài, wǒ yí ge rén Such a lot of dishes, how can I eat them
zěnme chīdeliǎo ne? all by myself?

Chàbuliǎo duōshao. There's hardly any difference; [they']re
more or less the same. ('lack-not-able
much')

Chē tài duō le, wǒmen wǔ diǎn Too many cars, we won't be able to
dàobuliǎo. make it by 5.
Dǎ ge diànhuà gào su tāmen, *Phone them and let them know, okay?*
hǎo bu hǎo.

c) Semantic extensions

Verb complements, particularly the directional ones, often have extended meanings. Qǐlái, for example, which as a directional complement means 'up [here]' (eg zhànqǐlái), also functions much more abstractly, in the sense of 'when it comes to [doing]':

Zhèi jiàn shì shuōqǐlái róngyì, This is easy to talk about, but tough to do.
zuòqǐlái nán.

Zhèi tiáo lù, kànqǐlái hěn jìn, This route looks short, but when you walk it,
zǒuqǐlái hěn yuǎn. it's quite far.

Shàoxīnghuà tīngqǐlái hěn xiàng Shaoxing dialect sounds like Shanghainese.
Shànghǎihuà. ['when you come to listen to it...']

Exercise 6

Do[or write what you would say for] the following in Chinese. If the comment is not about yourself, you should address the ‘him’, ‘her’, or ‘them’ as indicated:

1. Ask him to come down and take a look.
 2. Ask him to bring the books in.
 3. Ask them when they are moving in.
 4. Ask her to bring the books up here.
 5. Ask her to come out and take a look at the view.
 6. Ask her to drive the car over and pick the students up.
 7. Say that someone seems to have taken your bookbag by mistake.
 8. Explain that you can't afford to eat seafood – because it's so expensive.
 9. Explain that your car won't seat 7 – suggest taking 2 cars.
 10. Explain that you're full, and can't eat any more.
 11. Explain that you can't remember his name.
 12. Explain that you can't open the door – it's locked.
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9.9 Peking Duck

Preparing Peking duck, a conversation done in the style of a xiàngshēng ‘cross talk’ comedy routine. Jiǎ is the joker, yǐ is the straightman:

- | | |
|---|---|
| Jiǎ. Nǐ huì zuò Běijīng kǎoyā ma? | Can you cook Peking duck? |
| Yǐ <i>Bú huì!</i> | <i>Nope!</i> |
| Jiǎ. Tài hǎo le. Wǒ jiāo nǐ. Xiān zhǎo yì zhī yāzi lái. | Great; I'll teach you. First, find a duck. |
| Yǐ <i>Zhǎobudào ~ zhǎobuzháo.</i> | <i>I won't be able to.</i> |
| Jiǎ. Nà, nǐ qù mǎi yì zhī ba! | In that case, go and buy one, okay? |
| Yǐ <i>Mǎibuqǐ.</i> | <i>I can't afford to.</i> |
| Jiǎ. Nà, wǒ sòng (gěi) nǐ yì zhī ba. | Okay then, I'll give you one. |
| Yǐ <i>Duōxiè.</i> | <i>Thanks.</i> |
| Jiǎ. Nà, nǐ xiān bǎ yāzi xǐgānjìng! | Well, first clean the duck! |
| Yǐ <i>Hǎo, xǐ yāzi.</i> | <i>Okay, clean duck.</i> |
| Jiǎ. Ránhòu bǎ cōng jiāng fāngjìn yā dùzi lǐ qu. | Afterwards put the scallions and ginger in its stomach. |

- Yī Hǎo, fàng cōng jiāng. Okay, put in scallions and ginger.
- Jiǎ. Xiànzài bǎ yāzi fàngjìn kǎoxiāng lǐ qu. Now put the duck in the oven.
- Yī Hǎo, kǎo yāzi. Okay, roast the duck.
- Jiǎ. Xiǎoxīn, bié kǎohú le. Careful, don't burn it.
- Yī Fàngxīn, kǎoshì kǎodehú,
kǎoyā, kǎobuhú. Don't worry, I only 'burn out' on exams,
I don't burn ducks.

Notes

- a) Xiàngshēng 'cross talk', a popular style of comedy that involves a lot of language play; usually involving two people, one of whom plays straight to the wit of the other.
- b) Sòng 'to present; escort'; sòng, like gěi, can take both person and thing as objects. More often, however, it is followed by gěi: sòng gěi; cf. mài gěi 'sell to s/o' (but with mài, gěi is not optional).
- c) Xiān, Adv 'first'.
- d) Xiǎoxīn 'careful (small-heart)'; cf. fāngxīn 'take care (put-heart)'.
e) The routine ends in a play on kǎo 'to test' and kǎo 'to bake'; hú is a SV meaning 'to burn [food]', but in slang, it also means 'to fail an exam'.

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