

TWO ENGLISH MODIFICATION PATTERNS FOR CHINESE STUDENTS

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BOTH CHINESE AND ENGLISH use word order as a structural device. However, this does not indicate that all the patterns of word order in the one language are the same as those of the other language. Neither does it indicate that the two languages do not use one or more patterns that are alike.

The purpose of this article is to show one striking similarity and one striking difference between the English modification patterns and those in Chinese, to point out the importance of the knowledge of such a difference both to the teacher and to the students, and to show how a difficulty resulting from such a difference can be effectively overcome.

The English modification patterns discussed here are limited to those composed of words modifying words that function as nouns. Such modifications fall into two main divisions: pre-modifications and post-modifications. Modifiers which are single words usually precede the word modified: e.g., "I have a *red* book." Modifiers which are groups of words usually follow the word modified: e.g., "I have a book *from China*." In Chinese, modifiers of both kinds usually precede the word modified.

In English a single word when used as a modifier usually precedes what is modified. For example: "the *English* books," "the *hard* books," "the *two* books," "the *first* books," "the *boy's* books." When such single words are put together, they usually fall into a specific order. For example:

the						books
the						books
the				hard	English	books
the			two	hard	English	books
the		first	two	hard	English	books
the	boy's	first	two	hard	English	books

the						books
the	boy's					books
the	boy's	first				books
the	boy's	first	two			books
the	boy's	first	two	hard		books
the	boy's	first	two	hard	English	books

Modifiers composed of word groups usually follow the word modified. For example: "the cover *of the book*," "the boy *in section one*," "the girl *with a beautiful voice*."¹

Those who teach English to students whose native language is Chinese will not have any difficulty in teaching the word order of pre-modifiers in English. In Chinese, the order of modification of the pre-modifiers of such a series as given above is the same as that of English. In other words, each of the single word modifiers in the group given falls into the same position in a group of Chinese words. However, in the case of post-modifiers, the problem is entirely different. Teachers will find that many students use as a pre-modifier a construction that should have been a post-modifier in English. They will substitute "the *of the book* cover" for "the cover *of the book*," "the *in section one* boy" for "the boy *in section one*," "the *with a beautiful voice* girl" for "the girl *with a beautiful voice*."²

Teachers of English who know the difference between the modification pattern in Chinese and that in English will be able to point out to the students that word-group modifiers that are pre-modifiers in Chinese are post-modifiers in English. By pointing out the difference, the teacher will find it easier to get the problem across to the students. By knowing the difference, the students will find it easier to learn the foreign language.

Before the teacher drills the students orally, it is advisable for him to explain to them the pattern to be practiced. The following method is proposed to handle the question of the teaching of English post-modifiers to Chinese students. The teacher puts the following pattern on the blackboard:

the _____	cover _____
the _____	picture _____
the _____	man _____

¹ "The student *standing by the door*," "the man *who came to dinner*," "the time *when he arrived*," "the pie *(that) I made*" are some of the examples not treated in this article. Such structures, which usually come later for a student who is learning English, may be practiced with the same method suggested here.

² Likewise in teaching Chinese to English-speaking students, it is necessary to emphasize the point that modifiers, such as those given, which are post-modifiers in English are pre-modifiers in Chinese. The method suggested in this article may also be used to drill students to use pre-modifiers.

He shows that there are two positions in English that modifiers may occupy. Whether the modifier occupies the position preceding the noun or following the noun depends upon the kind of modifier. Single words such as *paper*, *beautiful*, *wise*, etc., precede the noun. Thus the English speaking person says: "the *paper* cover," the *beautiful* picture," "the *wise* man." Word groups such as *of the book*, *on the box*, *at the door*, etc., follow the noun. Thus English speaking people say: "the cover *of the book*," "the picture *on the box*," "the man *at the door*." The teacher's examples are limited to this specific difference. After the students have grasped the difference, the teacher goes on with a series of oral drills, for to know how a language operates, and to be able to speak a language are two entirely different things.

The following practices should be given according to the order suggested. Practice 1 aims at getting the students to establish the habit of repeating the post-modifier with the word modified.

Practice 1

Pattern:

the _____ name _____

Teacher:

the name _____ of the book

Student A:

the name of the book

All students:

the name of the book

Teacher:

the pencil _____ in the drawer

Student B:

the pencil in the drawer

All students:

the pencil in the drawer

Teacher:

the box _____ on the floor

Student C:

the box on the floor

All students:

the box on the floor

After the students have acquired the desired fluency, the teacher proceeds with the following exercise in which the students have to change the word order.

Practice 2

Pattern:

the _____ desk _____

Teacher:

in the corner _____ the desk

Student A:

the desk in the corner

All students:

the desk in the corner

Teacher:

on the street _____ the cars

Student B:

the cars on the street

All students:

the cars on the street

Teacher:

of the student _____ the name

Student C:

the name of the student

All students:

the name of the student

By now the students should have control over the desired word order. The teacher goes on with the following exercise in which the students have to distinguish the positions that different modifiers occupy.

Practice 3

Pattern:

the _____ material _____

Teacher:	the material	red
Student A:	the red material	
All students:	the red material	
Teacher:	the material	of the coat
Student B:	the material of the coat	
All students:	the material of the coat	
Teacher:	in the bottle	the ink
Student C:	the ink in the bottle	
All students:	the ink in the bottle	
Teacher:	the ink	blue
Student D:	the blue ink	
All students:	the blue ink	

After the students are sure of the position of single word modifiers and that of modifiers composed of a group of words, the teacher repeats the explanation he gave for the different positions of different modifiers. The following exercise is given to test whether the students have grasped the essential point of the whole series of exercises. In the following exercise the students have to distinguish the positions of pre-modifiers and post-modifiers when both are given.

Practice 4

Pattern:

the _____ books _____

Teacher:	big	on the desk
Student A:	the big books on the desk	
All students:	the big books on the desk	
Teacher:	black	in the case
Student B:	the black books in the case	
All students:	the black books in the case	
Teacher:	at the store	interesting
Student C:	the interesting books at the store	
All students:	the interesting books at the store	