

## 4.7 Studying and working

### 4.7.1 Vocabulary

<i>N</i>	<i>N or V</i>	<i>V+O</i>	<i>V+O</i>	<i>V</i>	<i>V</i>
zhuānyè <i>a major [PRC]; a specialty; a discipline</i>	zhǔxiū <i>a major; to major in [Tw]</i>	dúshū <i>study; attend school</i>	niànshū <i>read; study [Tw]</i>	xuéxí <i>to study; to learn; emulate [PRC]</i>	xué <i>study; learn; imitate</i>
<i>V+O</i>	<i>V+O</i>	<i>V</i>	<i>V+O</i>	<i>V+O</i>	
shàngxué <i>attend-school attend school; go to school</i>	kāixué <i>begin-school start school</i>	gōngzuò <i>a job; to work; have a job</i>	gànhuór <i>do-livelihood to be doing s/t; to work [PRC]</i>	bìyè <i>conclude-undertaking graduate</i>	

In later units, you will discover that the difference between a two-syllable verb such as xuéxí or gōngzuò and a verb + object (V+O) such as gànhuór or bìyè is that the latter combination is much less stable. With V+O constructions, the O can be detached from the verb: Gàn shénme huó ne? ‘What’s [he] doing?’

### 4.7.2 Major; specialization

A major subject of study, or a specialization, is zhuānyè ‘special-study’ or, particularly in Taiwan, zhǔxiū ‘main-study’; the latter is also a verb, ‘to specialize; to major’.

Nǐ de zhuānyè / zhǔxiū shì shénme?  
Shì wùlǐ(xué).  
Shì yīnyuè(xué).

What’s your specialty/major?  
Physics.  
Music

### 4.7.3 To study

There are a number of verbs used for studying and learning, with differences in usage between the Mainland and Taiwan.

a) One set includes the verbs xué and xuéxí ‘study; learn’, the latter rarely used in Taiwan. Xuéxí is often used for the *activity* of studying (often expressed as niànshū in Taiwan).

Dàjiā dōu zài nǎr?

Dōu zài túshūguǎn xuéxí ~ niànshū;  
míngtiān yǒu kǎoshì.

Where is everyone?

They’re in the library studying;  
there’s a test tomorrow.

But in many contexts, both the single and [except in Taiwan] the disyllabic form are both possible:

Xuésheng dōu yīnggāi xué<xí>  
wàiyǔ, bú duì ma?

Students should all study foreign  
languages, no?

Ng, dōu yīnggāi xué!

Yes, they should!

However, xué is preferred in the following examples (both of which translate ‘learn’ rather than ‘study’):

Zhōngwén hěn nán xué ba.  
Yǒu diǎnr nán, kěshì fēicháng yǒu yìsi.

Chinese must be tough to learn.  
It is a bit, but it's fascinating!

Tā hěn cōngmíng, xué+de hěn kuài.

She's quite bright -- [she] learns fast.

b) Xuéxí also means ‘emulate’, with the model, usually introduced by xiàng ‘towards’:

Xiàng Léi Fēng xuéxí!

‘Learn from Lei Feng (Emulate Lei Feng)’. [Lei Feng is a well-known labor hero from the 1960s.]

c) When the question ‘what are you studying’ is not about what you *happen* to be studying at that moment, but rather what field of study you are committed to, then the question (and answer) is usually cast as a nominalization, ie ‘you be one [de] who studies what’. (cf. Nǐ <shì> shǔ shénme de? in §4.6.3.)

Q Nǐ shì xué shénme de?

What are you studying?

A Wǒ shì xué wùlǐxué de.

I'm studying physics.

#### 4.7.4 Zài + verb ‘action in progress’

Talking about being in school versus working often leads to comments that express ongoing action, such as: ‘she’s still in school’ or ‘he’s working now’. So here we take a brief detour to consider how to express action in progress in Chinese.

It turns out that zài ‘be at’ not only occurs with noun objects to form location phrases (zài bàngōngshì ‘in the office’; zài wàitou ‘outside’) and post-verbal phrases (tā shēng zài Sūzhōu), but it occurs in the adverb position, before a verb, to emphasize ‘action in progress’ – often in conjunction with a final ne, which suggests a level of immediacy and engagement.

Tā chī zǎofàn le ma?  
Hái méi ne, tā hái zài xǐzǎo ne.

Has she eaten?  
No, not yet; she's still showering.

Zhāng Héng zài nǎ?  
Tā zài kànbào ne.

Where's Zhang Heng?  
He's reading the paper.

Duìbuqǐ, wǒ hái zài chīfàn ne.  
Nǐ <zài> chī shénme ne?

Sorry, I'm still eating.  
What are you eating?

Zhōu Shuāng qǐlái le ma?  
Hái méi ne, tā hái zài shuìjiào ne.

Is Zhou Shuang up?  
No, not yet, he's still sleeping.

Ongoing action need not always be explicitly marked with zài; sometimes the final ne suffices to suggest that the action is in progress:

Nǐ chī shénme ne?  
Chī kǒuxiāngtáng ne.

What are you eating?  
Chewing gum ('mouth-fragrant-candy')

Nǐ kàn shénme ne?  
Kàn Shìjiè Bēi de xiāoxi ne!

What are you reading?  
An article on the World Cup.

#### 4.7.5 Studying; being in school

Studying in the sense of being in school (or college) is expressed by one of a set of words that includes the synonymous verb+object compounds, dúshū and niànshū, literally 'be studying (study books)'. The two overlap with shàngxué, also a verb+object, which has the sense of 'being in school; studying' as well as 'starting school' – at the beginning of the day. In the following interchange, all three V+Os are acceptable:

Jiǎ Nǐ mèimei duō dà le?

How old is your sister?

Yǐ Èrshíqī

27.

Jiǎ Tā hái zài dúshū ma?

Is she still in school?

Yǐ Duì, tā hái zài dúshū, shì dàxué de xuésheng, zài Qīnghuá Dàxué xué yīxué de.

Yes, she is, she's a university student, studying medicine at Tsinghua University.

However, in the following interchange, where the sense is 'go to school; begin school for the day', shàngxué is more likely:

Měitiān jǐ diǎn <qù> shàngxué?

What time does [he] go to school?

Tā měitiān qī diǎn bàn qù shàngxué. He goes to school every day at 7:30.

'To begin the term at a school (or university)' is kāixué (the kāi of kāihuì 'hold/attend a meeting' or kāichē 'drive [a vehicle]'):

Wǒmen jiǔyuè èr hào kāixué.  
Zhōngguó xuésheng yě shì jiǔ yuèfēn kāixué.

We start classes on September 2<sup>nd</sup>.  
Chinese students start in September, too.

O, Zhōngguó dàxué yě shì  
jiǔyuèfèn kāixué ma?  
*Shì de.*

Oh, Chinese universities also begin in  
September?  
*That's right!*

#### 4.7.6 Work

Students graduate and get jobs. In which case, the interchange in the previous section might read:

Jiǎ	Nǐ mèimei duō dà le?	How old is your sister?
Yǐ	Èrshíqī	27.
Jiǎ	Tā hái zài dúshū ma?	Is she still in school?
Yǐ	Tā bìyè le, tā gōngzuò le.	She's graduated, she's working.
Jiǎ	Shénme gōngzuò?	What sort of job?
Yǐ	Tā shì gāo diànnǎo de.	She does computing.

#### Note

gāo a verb with a broad range of meaning: 'do; make; manage; deal with; set up; pick up; etc.

#### Other examples

Jiǎ	Tā zài shénme dìfang gōngzuò?	Where does he work?
Yǐ	Tā zài bǎoxiǎn gōngsī gōngzuò.	He works in an insurance company
Jiǎ	Nǐ zhǎo shéi?	Who are you looking for?
Yǐ	Zhǎo xiǎo Féng – Féng Xiǎoquán.	Young Feng – Feng Xiaoquan.
Jiǎ	Tā zài gànhuó ne, zài cāngkù.	He's working, in the warehouse.
Yǐ	Zhème wǎn, hái zài gànhuó ne?	So late [and] he's still at work?
Jiǎ	Ng, tā shìr ~ shìqing tài duō le!	Yup, he's got too much [to do].

#### 4.7.7 College and department

Establishing a person's department (xì) or school or university (dàxué) makes use of the question word něi (nǎ) and the general M gè: něi ge xì; něi ge dàxué. There are two ways to ask about university and department. One uses zài:

Nǐ shì zài něi ge dàxué?	Which university are you at?
Nǐ shì zài něi ge xì?	Which department are you in?

The other does not use zài, but rather, the nominalizing pattern but with shì and final de, along the lines of the earlier statements of a major: wǒ shì xué wùlǐ de ‘I study physics.’

Nǐ shì nǐ ge dàxué de?

Which is your university?

Nǐ shì nǐ ge xì de?

Which is your department?

So, for example:

Jiǎ. Qǐngwèn, nǐ shì nǐ ge dàxué de?

Which university are you at?

Yǐ. Wǒ shì Běijīng Dàxué de.

I'm at Peking University [sic].

Jiǎ. O, Běi Dà; nà nǐ shì xué  
shénme de?

Oh, Bei Da; so what are you  
studying?

Yǐ. Wǒ shì xué guǎnlǐxué de.

I'm studying management.

Jiǎ. Zài nǐ ge xì?

In which department?

Yǐ. Zài Jīngjì xì.

Economics.

#### Exercise 4.

Explain:

- that you are [years old];
- that you're at [university / school];
- that you're an [grad / undergrad];
- that you're a [grade-level] student there;
- that your major is [...];
- that you're in the department of [...];
- that you are taking [number] of subjects this semester; [list]
- that you have [number] of classes today;
- that you have classes today at [time] and [time];
- that you have classes everyday except Wednesday.
- that you were born and grew up in Chengdu, but now you live in Nanjing.

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