

A Scope-Oriented Study on the Co-occurrence and Distribution of Connective Word “danshi” and Its Synonyms

Junlei Tian

School of Foreign Studies, China Three Gorges University, Yichang, 443002, China

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Abstract: From the organizational point of view, the connective word “danshi” can assume the function of connecting different elements within the same simple sentence; and also several subordinate clauses of the same complex sentence. Above the phrastic level, “danshi” can realize the interphrastic and textual chaining in an enunciative segment or a discourse, it contributes to the structuring of the text by marking semantic-logical relations between the clauses or between the sequences that compose them. Being the most frequently used adversatives, “danshi”, “dan”, “keshi” and “buguo” are the most representative of the words called *zhuanzhe*, literally “change of direction of speech orientation”.

1. Introduction

In general, the “danshi” (dànshì) connector is polyfunctionally important for the processes of contrasting and structuring discourse. For argumentative discourses, it would favor the development of the argument and thematic progression.

From a connection point of view, Poizat-Xie (2002) managed to classify adversative connectors into two categories by combining their distributional state: conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs [1]. We can thus describe her classification criteria: the position of the connectors in relation to the subject and the possibility of combination with a standard conjunction.

Considering adversative connectors related to coordination, Poizat-Xie has done a detailed research on this kind of connector in Chinese. Returning to adversative connectors, we can note the following division: on the one hand, apparently “problem-free” conjunctions such as *dan*, *danshi*, *ran’er*, *er*; on the other hand, items that are likely to have a dual nature, both conjunction and adverb, such as *buguo* and *ke/keshi*; and finally, items that are rather close to adverbs such as *que*, *dao*, *fan*, *fandao*, *fan’er*.

2. Connective Words “danshi” and “keshi”

In contemporary Chinese, there are a dozen adversative connectors, and the terms *opposition*, *contrast*, *reversal*, *reserve* are often used in the literature of Chinese linguistics, which are different adversative forms[1]: “buguo, dan, danshi, dao, er, fan, fandao, fan’er, ke, keshi, que” and “ran’er”. By adversative connectors in contemporary Chinese, we mean all the lexical units, conjunctions and

conjunctive adverbs, which can join two sequences, (either constituents or sentences) conjoined. Among them, the adversative connector “danshi” (“dan” or “danshi”) is in confrontation with the “mais” in French.

The conjunction “danshi” (and its synonyms “buguo” and “keshi”) introduces a reluctance, an opposition, and will be translated into French as “mais”, “cependant”, “toutefois”, “pourtant”. The use of this conjunction is not complicated: it is simply placed just in front of the proposition on which it relates. Such as (1) in Table 1:

Table 1: Case (1)

Original text in Pinyin: (1) wǒ hěn xǐ huān zhōng guó gǔ diǎn wén xué, dàn shì mǐ yǒu xì tǒng dì yán jiū guò.[2]
French translation: (1) <i>J'aime beaucoup la littérature classique chinoise, mais je ne l'ai pas étudiée systématiquement.</i>

There are two main words in Chinese to express “mais” in French: “keshi” et “danshi”. They are practically identical. The slight difference is that “keshi” is a little more formal and common, while “danshi” is more informal and stronger in its nuance. Typically, “keshi” and “danshi” precede a new sentence in a statement. In spoken Chinese, “keshi” can be informally reduced to “ke”, and “danshi” can be informally reduced to “dan”. Such as (2) in table 2:

Table 2: Case (2)

Original text in Pinyin: (2) jǐ gè nǚ rén yǒu diǎn shī wàng,yě yǒu diǎn shāng xīn, gè rén zài xīn lǐ mà zhuó zì jǐ de hěn xīn zéi. kě shì qīng nián rén yǒng yuǎn cháo zhe yú kuài de shì qíng xiǎng,nǚ rén mén yóu qí róng yì wàng jì nèi xiē bù tòng kuài.bù jiǔ,tā mén yòu shuō xiào qǐ lā le.[3]
French translation: <i>Ces quelques femmes áaient un peu déques et un peu tristes, chacune grondant dans son cœur son voleur de cœur. Mais les jeunes pensent toujours aux choses agréables, et les femmes, en particulier, oublie facilement celles qui ne sont pas douloureuses. Bientôt, elles se mirent à rire à nouveau.</i>

For case (3) in table 3, “danshi” can connect words, but “keshi” does not have this function.

Table 3: Case (3)

Original text in Pinyin: (3) wǒ mén zhī shí fèn zǐ yào dān fù qǐ tí gāo rén mín kē xué wén huà shuǐ píng zhè gè jiān nán dàn shì guāng róng de rèn wù.[3]
French translation: <i>Nous, intellectuels, devons assumer la tâche difficile mais glorieuse d'élever le niveau scientifique et culturel des peuples.</i>

3. “danshi” and “ran’er”

Table 4: Case (4)

Original text in French: <i>C'est là, ce me semble, un fort mauvais raisonnement; car premièrement le bien que j'aliène me devient une chose tout à fait étrangère, et dont l'abus m'est indifférent, mais il m'importe qu'on n'abuse point de ma liberté, et je ne puis, sans me rendre coupable du mal qu'on me forcera de faire, m'exposer à devenir l'instrument du crime.</i> (p.58) [5]
Chinese translation: (4) wǒ jué de,zhè yàng tuī lùn,shì dà cuò tè cuò de,yīn wèi, dì yī,wǒ de cái chǎn yī jīng zhuǎn ràng zhī hòu,jiù biàn chéng yǔ wǒ wú guān de dōng xī,bié rén rú hé làn yòng,yǔ wǒ méi yǒu guān xi; rán ér ,rú guǒ bié rén làn yòng wǒ de zì yóu,nà jiù yǔ wǒ yǒu guān le,yīn wèi wǒ hěn yǒu kě néng chéng wéi bié de fàn zuì de gōng jù,qù gān yī xiē shǐ wǒ bù néng bù chéng wéi zuì rén de huài shì(p.111) [6]

“danshi” and “ran’er” are both adversative connectors. Lü Shuxiang (1985) considers that

“ran’er” has a stronger written property than “danshi”[2]; according to Guo Zhiliang (1999), “ran’er” is the stronger adversative connector[4]. In speech, “ran’er” is not used, but in writing, it expresses a strong opposition.

Table 5: Case (5)

Original text in French: <i>Il est très difficile de réduire à l’obéissance celui qui ne cherche point à commander et le politique le plus adroit ne viendrait pas à bout d’assujettir des hommes qui ne voudraient qu’être libres ; mais l’inégalité s’étend sans peine parmi des âmes ambitieuses et lâches, toujours prêtes à courir les risques de la fortune et à dominer ou servir presque indifféremment selon qu’elle leur devient favorable ou contraire.</i> (p.61) [5]
Chinese translation: (5) rán’ér , yào xiǎng shǐ nèi xiē méi yǒu tǒng zhì tā rén zhī xīn de rén guāi guāi dì fú cóng, nà shì hěn nán de; jí shǐ shì shǒu duàn gāo míng de zhèng zhì jiā yě wèi néng zuò dào shǐ nèi xiē yī xīn zhī zhuī qiú zì yóu de rén fǔ shǒu chēng chéng; rán’ér bù píng děng xiàn xiàng qu’è kě yǐ háo wú kùn nán dì zài nèi xiē yǒu tǎn xīn hé lǎn xián de rén dāng zhōng màn yán; tā mén gān yuàn tīng cóng míng yùn de bǎi bù: shì tǒng zhì bié rén hái shì shì hòu bié rén, zài tā mén kàn lái dū wú suǒ wèi, zhè yào kàn duì tā mén shì yǒu lì hái shì méi yǒu lì ér dīng. (p.117) [6]

In the previous cases (4) and (5) in table 4 and table 5, “ran’er” is either at the head of a clause or at the beginning of a paragraph. This connector is used to provoke a potential anaphoric function in the sense of negating what has just been known. Thus, it achieves its overall connecting function by successfully linking the *p* and *q*. This is approximate with the function of “danshi”.

4. “danshi”, “buguo” and “fan’er”

Like other adversative connectors, “buguo” can mark an opposition, but less strong than “danshi”. Very often, “buguo” rectifies *p* by adding a personal judgment in *q*, in order to introduce a conclusion *r* little different from the expectation of *p*. Such as cases (6) and (7) in table 6 and table 7:

Table 6: Case (6)

Original text in French: <i>Quand il serait vrai que la commisération ne serait qu’un sentiment qui nous met à la place de celui qui souffre, sentiment obscur et vif dans l’homme sauvage, développé, mais faible dans l’homme civil, qu’importerait cette idée à la vérité de ce que je dis, sinon de lui donner plus de force ?</i> (p.38) [5]
Chinese translation: (6) jí shǐ shuō lián mǐn xīn zhēn de zhǐ bù guò shì shǐ wǒ mén shè shēn chǔ dì dì wéi shòu kǔ de rén zhuó xiǎng de yī zhǒng gǎn qíng (zhè zhǒng gǎn qíng zài yě mǎn rén xīn zhōng bù míng xiǎn, dàn shì qí áng lì è ér zài wén míng rén xīn zhōng suī jiào míng xiǎn, dàn hěn wēi ruò). zhè zhǒng shuō fǎ, chú le gèng jiā yǒu lì dì zhèng míng wǒ de lùn diǎn fú hé zhēn lǐ yǐ wài, hái néng shuō míng shén me ne? (p.77) [6]

In Chinese, “fan’er” is used in the second part of the sentence to express “on the contrary” or “conversely”. The meaning of “fan’er” goes much further than a simple “but” (“danshi” in Chinese) and is generally used to explain that something is completely opposite to what one expected. (Lü Shuxiang 1999)[2]

It is also important to note that “fan’er” is not a conjunction; it is an adverb. (Ma Zhen, 1983; 2024:73) [7][8] In practice, this means that rather than having two statements, it is within one statement (in the second part). More specifically, it needs to come after the subject and before the

verb. We see that a conjunction such as “danshi” comes before the subject; “fan’er” in this case is different. In fact, rather than replacing “danshi”, it joins it to reinforce it. Furthermore, the subject can sometimes be omitted within the second part of the sentence. If there is a subject, “fan’er” will always come after it. Such as (8) in table 8:

Table 7: Case (7)

Original text in French: <i>Des cris inarticulés, beaucoup de gestes et quelques bruits imitatifs durent composer pendant longtemps la langue universelle, à quoi joignant dans chaque contrée quelques sons articulés et conventionnels dont, comme je l’ai déjà dit, il n’est pas trop facile d’expliquer l’institution, on eut des langues particulières, mais grossières, imparfaites, et telles à peu près qu’en ont encore aujourd’hui diverses nations sauvages.</i> (p.46) [5]
Chinese translation: (7) zài hěn cháng de shí jiān lǐ, tā mén de yǔ yán zhǐ bù guò shì jǐ zhǒng bù fēn yīn jié de jiào hǎn shēng, shǒu shì hé nǐ yīn, cǐ wài, měi gè dì qū yòu yǒu yī xiē xí yòng de jiào shēng, bù guò zhèi xiē shēng yīn, zhèng rú wǒ zài qián miàn shuō guò de shì hěn nán dòng de tā mén de yì sī de. suǒ yǐ, dāng chū de yuán shǐ rén yǒu xǔ duō zhǒng tè bié de yǔ yán, dàn shì tā mén dōu hěn jiǎn dān, yě hěn bù wán shàn, tóng jīn tiān de jǐ zhǒng yě mǎn rén shǐ yòng de yǔ yán chà bù duō. (p.91) [6]

Table 8: Case (8)

Original text in Pinyin: (8) fēng bù dàn méi tíng, fǎn ér gēng dà le. [2]
French translation: Non seulement le vent ne s’est pas arrêté, mais il est même devenu plus fort. (Or: <i>Au lieu de s’arrêter, le vent est plus fort.</i> Or: <i>Le vent n’a pas cessé, il est plus fort.</i>)

No matter what specific sentence format “fan’er” appears in, the grammatical meaning it expresses is the same. As for the clause where “fan’er” is located, it is sometimes in a transitional relationship with the previous clause, sometimes in a progressive relationship, and sometimes in a hypothetical relationship. This is the grammatical meaning expressed by the complex sentence containing “fan’er”, not the grammatical meaning expressed by “fan’er” itself, although the two are related. (Ma Zhen, 1983; 2024:73)[7][8]

5. Conclusions

Above the phrastic level, “danshi” can realize the interphrastic and textual chaining in an enunciative segment or a discourse, it contributes to the structuring of the text by marking semantic-logical relations between the clauses or between the sequences that compose them. Zhang Wenxian (2017) conducted a systematic research on the Chinese adversative connector “danshi”. [9] From the organizational point of view, this connector can assume the function of connecting different elements within the same simple sentence; and also several subordinate clauses of the same complex sentence. Above the phrastic level, “danshi” can realize the inter-phrastic and textual chaining in an enunciative segment or a discourse, it contributes to the structuring of the text by marking semantic-logical relations between the clauses or between the sequences that compose them.

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