4.7 Studying and working

4.7.1 Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>N or V</th>
<th>V+O</th>
<th>V+O</th>
<th>V</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>zhuânyè</td>
<td>zhûxîi</td>
<td>nuânsâmû</td>
<td>xûéxî</td>
<td>xuê</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>a major</td>
<td>to major in [Tw]</td>
<td>study; attend school</td>
<td>to study; to learn; emulate</td>
<td>study; learn; imitate</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>a specialty;</td>
<td>a specialty;</td>
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<td>a discipline</td>
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\[\begin{array}{llll}
V+O & V+O & V & V+O \\
shàngxué & kâixué & gôngzuô & gânhuór \\
attend-school & begin-school & a job; & do-livlihood \\
go to school; & start school; & to work; & to be doing s/t; \\
& & have a job; & graduate [PRC] \\
\end{array}\]

In later units, you will discover that the difference between a two-syllable verb such as xuéxî or gôngzuô and a verb + object (V+O) such as gânhuór or biyê is that the latter combination is much less stable. With V+O constructions, the O can be detached from the verb: Gân shênme huô ne? ‘What’s [he] doing?’

4.7.2 Major; specialization

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

\[
\text{Nî de zhuânyè / zhûxîi shí shénme?} \quad \text{What’s your specialty/major?}
\]

\[
\text{Shí wûlî(xuê).} \quad \text{Physics.}
\]

\[
\text{Shí yînyuê(xuê).} \quad \text{Music}
\]

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 xuê and xuéxî ‘study; learn’, the latter rarely used in Taiwan. Xuéxî is often used for the activity of studying (often expressed as niânshû in Taiwan).

\[
\text{Dâjîâ dôu zài nãr?} \quad \text{Where is everyone?}
\]

\[
\text{Dôu zài tûshûguân xuéxî – niânshû; \quad} \quad \text{They’re in the library studying;}
\]

\[
\text{mîngtiân yôu kâoshi.} \quad \text{there’s a test tomorrow.}
\]
But in many contexts, both the single and [except in Taiwan] the disyllabic form are both possible:

Xuésheng dōu yīnggāi xué<xí> Students should all study foreign
wài yǔ, bù dui ma? 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. Chinese must be tough to learn.
Yōu diǎnr nán, kěshí fēicháng yōu yìsì. 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 <shi> shū shénme de? in §4.6.3.)

Q Nǐ shì xué shénme de? What are you studying?
A Wo 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 wài tòu ‘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? Has she eaten?
Hái měi ne, tā hái zài xǐzǎo ne. No, not yet; she’s still showering.
Zhāng Héng zài nǎr?  Where’s Zhang Heng?
Tā zài kànbào ne.  He’s reading the paper.

Duìbuqǐ, wǒ hái zài chīfàn ne.  Sorry, I’m still eating.
Nǐ <zài> chī shénme ne?  What are you eating?

Zhōu Shuāng qǐlái le ma?  Is Zhou Shuang up?
Hái mèi ne, tā hái zài shuǐjiào ne.  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?  What are you eating?
Chī kǒuxiàngtáng ne.  Chewing gum (‘mouth-fragrant-candy’)

Nǐ kàn shénme ne?  What are you reading?
Kàn Shìjiè Bēi de xiǎoxī ne!  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 niǎnshū, 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:

Jiā  Nǐ mèimei duō dà le?  How old is your sister?
Yī  Èrshíqī  27.
Jiā  Tā hái zài dúshū ma?  Is she still in school?
Yī  Dui, tā hái zài dúshū, shì dàxué de xuéshēng, zài Qīnghuá Dàxué xué yǐxué 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:

Mèitiān jī diān <qù> shàngxué?  What time does [he] go to school?
Tā mèitiān qī diān bān 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 kāihui ‘hold/attend a meeting’ or kāichē ‘drive [a vehicle]’):

Wǒmen jiǔyuè èr hào kāixué.  We start classes on September 2nd.
Zhōngguó xuéshēng yě shì jiǔ yuèfēn kāixué.  Chinese students start in September, too.
O, Zhōngguó dàxué yě shì jìuyuèfēn kǎixué ma? Shi 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:

Jiā Nǐ mèimei duō dà le? How old is your sister?
Yí Ērshíqī 27.
Jiā Tā hái zài dúshū ma? Is she still in school?
Yí Tā biyè le, tā gōngzuò le. She’s graduated, she’s working.
Jiā Shénme gōngzuò? What sort of job?
Yí Tā shì gǎo diànnǎo de. She does computing.

Note
gǎo a verb with a broad range of meaning: ‘do; make; manage; deal with; set up; pick up; etc.

Other examples

Jiā Tā zài shénme dìfang gōngzuò? Where does he work?
Yí Tā zài bāoxiān gōngsī gōngzuò. He works in an insurance company

Jiā Nǐ zhǎo shéi? Who are you looking for?
Yí Zhǎo xiǎo Fēng – Féng Xiǎoquán. Young Feng – Feng Xiaoquan.
Jiā Tā zài gānhuò ne, zài cāngkù. He’s working, in the warehouse.
Yí Zhème wán, hái zài gānhuò ne? So late [and ] he’s still at work?
Jiā Ng, tā shìr ~ shiqing 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 (nà) and the general M ěi 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: wò shì xué wù de ‘I study physics.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nǐ shì nǐ ge dàxué de?</th>
<th>Which is your university?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nǐ shì nǐ ge xi de?</td>
<td>Which is your department?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So, for example:

Jiā. Qǐng wèn, nǐ shì nǐ ge dàxué de?  Which university are you at?
Yí. Wǒ shì Běijīng Dàxué de.  I’m at Peking University [sic].

Jiā. O, Běi Dà; nà nǐ shì xué shénme de?  Oh, Bei Da; so what are you studying?
Yí. Wǒ shì xué guānlǐ xué de.  I’m studying management.
Jiā. Zài nǐ ge xi?  In which department?

**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.