

one who has observed the great variety of intonations among the English, Scotch, and Irish, will be ready to admit the possibility of the Chinese finding enough for all their wants.

*Distinction of Homophonous Words.*

With 700 monosyllables varied by 7 tones, the Amoy dialect might comprise 4,900 distinct monosyllabic words. But these tones are not fully employed and consequently all these possible combinations do not exist. Some monosyllables have only one word instead of seven; others have two, three or four only. In consequence of this deficiency existing as to some syllables, others have far more than seven words in connexion with them—8, 10, 12, 15, 18, 20, 25, 27, and in one case, 30 words. In examining more minutely this last case (the monosyllable “To”), we find under the first tone, 4 words; under the second, 5; under the third, 5; under the fourth, 1; under the fifth, 11; under the seventh, 3; and under the eighth, 1. Under the fifth tone then there are 11 words precisely homophonous; uttered exactly alike; the nicest ear can recognize no difference among them. How can intelligible conversation be maintained amid such chances of misapprehension?

There is usually very little danger that a verb will be mistaken for a noun or adjective. If, however, there be several homophonous verbs or adjectives, there will be danger of confusion. In such cases perspicuity is obtained by the combination of two synonymous or nearly synonymous verbs or adjectives, if the context does not prevent misapprehension. In the case of like-sounding nouns, there is another expedient which is worthy of explanation.

The English phrase “He has twenty *head* of cattle,” is perfectly intelligible. And yet it might be difficult to define the precise meaning, in that sentence, of the word “head.” The sentences, “We saw ten head of ducks,” “He caught ten head of fish,” would be at once condemned as unidiomatic. A person familiar with Chinese grammar would describe the word “head” as the “numeral,” “classative,” or “classifier” of the word cattle, and declare it to be not the classifier of ducks or fish. If in English it were customary to say not only “head of cattle,” but also “tails of fish,” “sticks of masts,” “sheets of sails,” “bows of anchors,” &c., the expedient, to which the Chinese have been driven by necessity, would be very fully illustrated. The nouns are seldom used without their appropriate classifiers. The numeral adjectives are not employed without the intervention of the