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Time expressions

年 (*nián*) (year), 月 (*yuè*) (month), 星期 (*xīngqī*) (week), and 天 (*tiān*) (day) are all nouns, but 年 (*nián*) (year) and 天 (*tiān*) (day) are also measure words. Therefore, they are used differently, following the patterns below.

Pattern

Examples

Numeral + 年/天

一年 (*yì nián*) (one year), 五天 (*wǔ tiān*) (five days)

Numeral + Measure Word + 月/星期

一個月 (*yí ge yuè*) (one month),
三星期 (*sān ge xīngqī*) (three weeks)

“One week” is 一個星期 (*yí ge xīngqī*), therefore “one week later” is 一個星期以後 (*yí ge xīngqī yǐhòu*).
“One month” is 一個月 (*yí ge yuè*), therefore “one month later” is 一個月以後 (*yí ge yuè yǐhòu*). Please note that “one month” is not 一月 (*yí yuè*) (January). The time expressions 月 (*yuè*) and 星期 (*xīngqī*) can be formed by using 下 (*xià*) (below) and 上 (*shàng*) (above), following the patterns below. “Below” (下) (*xià*) is used to refer to weeks and months in the future, and “above” (上) (*shàng*) to refer to weeks and months in the past.

月^a (*yuè*) (month)星期^b (*xīngqī*) (week)上上個月 (*shàng shàng ge yuè*)
(the month before last)上上(個)星期 (*shàng shàng [ge] xīngqī*)
(the week before last)上個月 (*shàng ge yuè*)
(last month)上(個)星期 (*shàng [ge] xīngqī*)
(last week)這個月 (*zhè ge yuè*)
(this month)這(個)星期 (*zhè [ge] xīngqī*)
(this week)下個月 (*xià ge yuè*)
(next month)下(個)星期 (*xià [ge] xīngqī*)
(next week)下下個月 (*xià xià ge yuè*)
(the month after next)下下(個)星期 (*xià xià [ge] xīngqī*)
(the week after next)

^aWe don't say ❌ 上月/下月.

^bThe measure word 個 can be omitted for 星期: 下個星期=下星期; 上個星期=上星期.

月^a (yuè) (month)

星期^b (xīngqī) (week)

上上個月 (shàng shàng ge yuè)
(the month before last)

上上(個)星期 (shàng shàng [ge] xīngqī)
(the week before last)

上個月 (shàng ge yuè)
(last month)

上(個)星期 (shàng [ge] xīngqī)
(last week)

這個月 (zhè ge yuè)
(this month)

這(個)星期 (zhè [ge] xīngqī)
(this week)

下個月 (xià ge yuè)
(next month)

下(個)星期 (xià [ge] xīngqī)
(next week)

下下個月 (xià xià ge yuè)
(the month after next)

下下(個)星期 (xià xià [ge] xīngqī)
(the week after next)

^aWe don't say ❌ 上月/下月.

^bThe measure word 個 can be omitted for 星期: 下個星期=下星期; 上個星期=上星期.

The below expressions using 天 (tiān) (day) and 年 (nián) (year) form two parallel series except for 昨天 (zuótiān) (yesterday) and 去年 (qùnián) (last year).

天 (tiān) (day)

年 (nián) (year)

大前天 (dàqiántiān)
(three days ago)

大前年 (dàqiánnián)
(three years ago)

前天 (qiántiān)
(the day before yesterday)

前年 (qiánnián)
(the year before last)

昨天 (zuótiān)
(yesterday)

去年 (qùnián)
(last year)

今天 (jīntiān)
(today)

今年 (jīnnián)
(this year)

明天 (míngtiān)
(tomorrow)

明年 (míngnián)
(next year)

後天 (hòutiān)
(the day after tomorrow)

後年 (hòunián)
(the year after next)

大後天 (dàhòutiān)
(three days from today)

大後年 (dàhòunián)
(three years from now)

EXERCISES

Based on the information given, fill in the blanks with the appropriate time expressions. Exercise 1 includes an example.

- 1 這個月是五月：上個月是四月，_____是三月，
_____是六月，_____是七月。
- 2 今天是星期三：昨天是_____，前天是_____，
明天是_____，後天是_____。