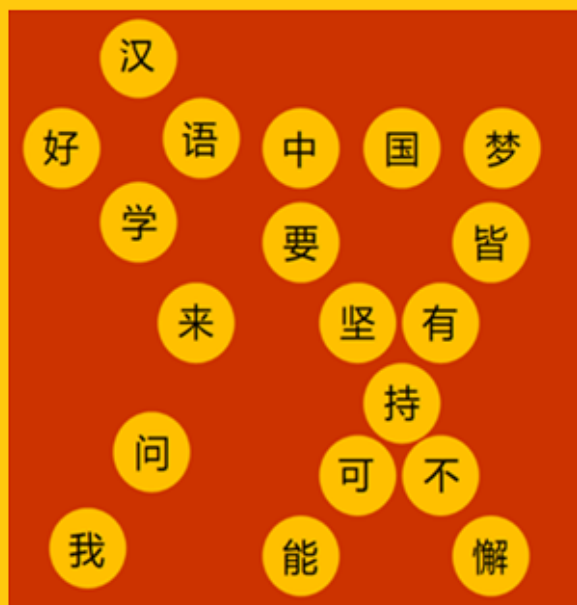


CHINESE LANGUAGE COURSE



BASICS OF CHINESE LANGUAGE
STUDY OF CHINA AND CHINESE LANGUAGE

Pǔtōnghuà 普通话 (普通話); *Guóyǔ* 國語 (國語); *Hànyǔ* 漢語 (漢語);

Huáyǔ 華語 (華語); *Zhōngwén* 中文

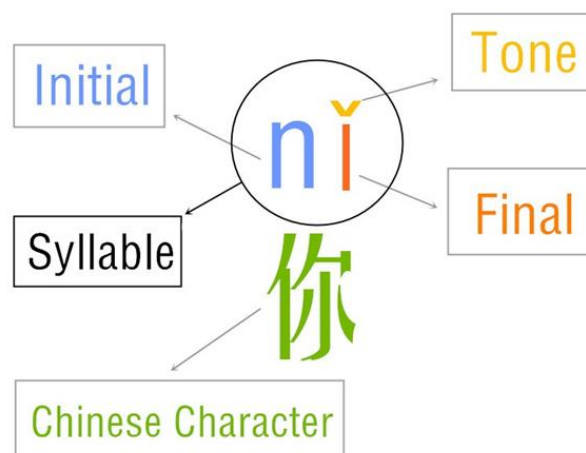
1) Chinese language is a part of the Sino-Tibetan language group and is considered the largest language in the world when counting only first language (native) speakers (1.3 billion people). Furthermore, it is divided into several dialects, among which the most widespread is modern Chinese, spoken by about 800 million people.

It is considered to be a part of morpho-syllabic writing system because the symbols (a character) represent a unit of pronunciation (a syllable) that is also a unit of meaning (a morpheme). Chinese language contains a total of 413 syllables. The syllables are the ones that can be roughly labeled as the "Chinese alphabet", which the Chinese language itself does not have. The syllables or/and characters are inflexible (they do not bend or conjugate), which makes learning much easier. They are always single-syllable, while the multi-syllable words can consist of various single-syllable syllable:

Example: *Biànsèlóng* 变色龙 = chameleon (direct translation: (to) change-colour-dragon)

The syllable structure:

- They begin with a consonant (in some cases it is missing, for example: a 阿),
- They end with a vowel, double or triple vowel (accompanied by tone), which can be followed by a final consonant "n" or "ng",
- There are a few more exceptions.



Each syllable can form different characters (sometimes several hundred), which are further separated by tones. You can see the table with syllables in the attached pdf document entitled 1. Syllables.

2) The term "Mandarin" is inappropriate for naming the Chinese language. Instead, we use the term "modern Chinese language".

3) These "pictures" (爱 我 很 三) are called characters.

In total, there are more than 50,000 characters, although an extensive dictionary of modern Chinese rarely lists more than 20,000. A slightly more educated Chinese person knows about 8,000 of them, and to read a newspaper you need to know around 3,000-4,000 characters.

4) PINYIN:

Pinyin is the official romanization system for Standard Chinese in mainland China, Singapore[citation needed], Taiwan (ROC), and countries with a significant amount of Chinese-speaking populations such as Malaysia. The term "Pinyin" 拼音 literally translates as "the sound of spelling". It was published by the Chinese government in 1958, revised several times, and amended in 1979. It is currently the most widespread system for writing Chinese characters in the romanization system.

It was primarily developed with the aim of improving the literacy rate among the then mostly illiterate population in China, but at the same time, it represents one of the consequences of the opening up of China and the growing interest from Western countries.

5) TRADITIONAL AND SIMPLIFIED CHARACTERS:

There are two types of characters in Chinese:

1. Traditional characters (*fántǐzì* 繁体字) were used in the entire Chinese territory in the past, but today it can be mostly found in Taiwan, Macau, and Hong Kong. Nonetheless, we can still sometimes see them in mainland China, but only on special occasions.

This reversal from traditional to simplified characters occurred in the 1950s when the communist government of mainland China began to reform the writing system by simplifying the characters. The aim of these reforms was to reduce illiteracy and thus facilitate the learning of the characters. The simplification process has reduced the number of character strokes.

2. Simplified characters (*jiǎntǐzì* 简体字).

Examples:

Traditional characters	Simplified characters
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龍	龙
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邊	边
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灣	湾
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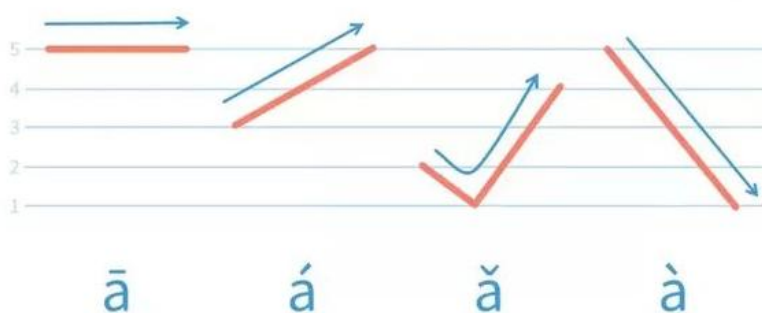
6) TONES:

Tones are those four lines that we write over pinyin. There are four tones + neutral. If you don't know the tone, you don't really know the word, because using the wrong tone can give a different meaning to the word. They represent one of the greatest challenges in learning Chinese, but they are of paramount importance.

For example, if we say the wrong tone, we can say something completely unexpected:

xióngmāo 熊猫 (panda)

xiōngmáo 胸毛 (chest hair)



7) GRAMMAR:

We learn grammar in the form of established sentence forms.

8) WRITTEN AND SPOKEN CHINESE LANGUAGE:

There is still a difference between formal (written) and colloquial (spoken) Chinese language. In the beginning, we always learn simple Chinese, that is, the one used in everyday life. However, if we pick up a newspaper or a book, we will quickly see that a different Chinese language awaits us there. It's not completely different, but it does contain characters, words, and sentence patterns that are mainly not used in everyday communication.

9) CULTURAL BACKGROUND:

Learning Chinese language without learning culture, history, philosophy, etc. is pointless! The development of Chinese culture has had a great influence on the development of the language throughout history, and the two are strongly interconnected. Learning characters is therefore not just learning characters- it is learning to recognize individual parts, historical background, etc. This cultural background is a thing that most Chinese universities do not offer enough to foreigners studying Chinese language there.

10) CLASSICAL AND MODERN CHINESE LANGUAGE:

Have you heard that people used to write characters from right to left? And from top to bottom? This is called classical Chinese (*wényán* 文言), which was officially in use until the 1920s. The use of traditional Chinese was strongly associated with Confucianism and at the same time represented a setback, rigidity, and unwillingness to abandon tradition. Because it was very difficult to learn, read, and understand, it was used only by officials and intellectuals, while the majority of the population was illiterate - the official language was inaccessible to them. In the 1920s, several language and writing reforms began to take place, with many intellectuals struggling to replace the stale traditional language with everyday language (*báihuà* 白话). They first did this in the field of literature, and then in other fields as well.

Traditional Chinese language is more abstract and much harder to understand than modern. However, it is still strongly embedded in Chinese culture - a great emphasis in the process of education is always on quoting well-known Chinese classical quotations.