

Brief Background Information on Mandarin Language Learning:

excerpts from:

British Council: Weicong Liang: 04 February 2014 - 14:37

<http://blog.hutong-school.com/why-learning-chinese-is-not-as-hard-as-you-think/wikipedia.org>

It's said that around 2-3,000 will be all you'd need to read a newspaper, and what most educated Chinese people know.

While English uses an alphabet, Chinese uses [hanzi](#), or Chinese characters, as its writing system.^[28] The [Chart of Common Characters of Modern Chinese \(simplified Chinese: 现代汉语常用字表; traditional Chinese: 現代漢語常用字表; pinyin: Xiàndài Hànyǔ Chángyòng Zì Biǎo\)](#), promulgated in [People's Republic of China](#), lists 2,500 common characters and 1,000 less-than-common characters.

Another difference, besides being only 26 characters, is that the English and French alphabet is used for both the writing and phonetic system for these languages. However, in Chinese, the reading and writing system uses the hanzi, but the phonetic system uses either the Zhuyin (Traditional) or Pinyin (Simplified) to help learners sound out the Chinese characters. Therefore, there is a considerably larger amount of characters that Mandarin learners must commit to memory.

Current Mandarin instruction:

Traditional Chinese - Taught K - Gr. 3

Chinese characters in any character set that does not contain newly created characters or character substitutions performed after 1946.

Zhuyin, a phonetic system popularly known as bopomofo, is designed to represent the Mandarin Chinese sounds and is used in teaching Traditional Chinese in countries like Taiwan. These phonetic symbols are not Chinese characters, but have roots in Chinese characters.

[房子](#)

ㄉㄞˋ ㄓㄩˋ

house

Simplified Chinese - Taught Gr. 4 -7

This written form mainly evolved and was adopted after the end of civil war and the establishment of today's P.R.China in 1949. The reason and purpose for the Chinese government to develop this simplified writing system is believed to be "simplifying the writing method, easing the effort in writing, and encouraging more people to become literate."

Pinyin is a phonetic system that shows how Chinese words are pronounced and was designed in China to be both a phonetic and a romanization system for Simplified Chinese.

[房子](#)

fáng zi

house

Characters

Another major difference is the characters. Let's take 人 (ren) as an example. A single 人 means a person, a human being. Two 人 make a new character, 从 (cong), which means to follow (one person followed by another person). Three 人 make 众, which means the masses or a crowd. Likewise, a single 木 means a tree or wood. Two 木 make 林, meaning woods. Three 木 make 森, which means a forest. We can build more complex Chinese characters by learning basic components and single-structure characters step by step. It is like we learn various English words by starting from the 26 letters.

Chinese vocabulary: makes sense!

How about you guess the meaning of the words below:

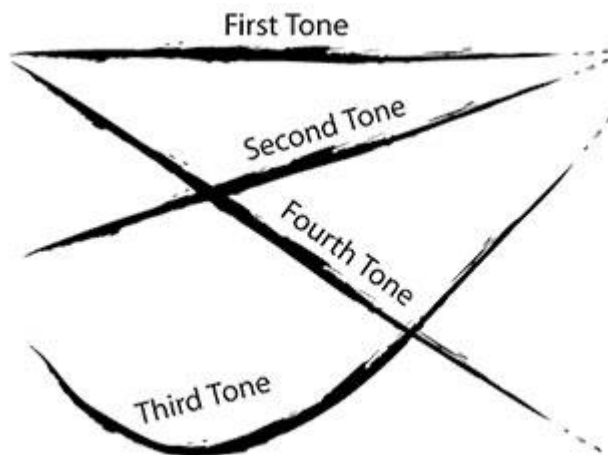
1. 电脑 diàn-nǎo = **Electricity + brain** = ?
2. 电话 diàn-huà = **Electricity + speech** = ?
3. 电视 diàn-shì = **Electricity + to view** = ?
4. 变色龙 biàn-sè-lóng = **Change + colour + dragon** = ?
5. 长颈鹿 cháng-jǐng-lù = **Long + neck + deer** = ?
6. 猫头鹰 māo-tóu-yīng = **Cat + head + hawk** = ?

(Answers: computer, telephone, television, chameleon, giraffe, owl)

All of the above words are examples of how the Chinese use known concepts of single characters to form new words.

The 4 tones in Mandarin are:

- Tone 1: Level Tone (ping) → —
Tone 2: Rising Tone (shang) → /
Tone 3: Departing Tone (qu) → ∨
Tone 4: Entering/Stop-Final Tone (ru) →



Grammar

Chinese grammar is in many ways similar to English grammar. A simple Chinese sentence structure consists of a subject, a predicate and an object. For example, 'I wash my hands' in Chinese is 我 Wo (I) 洗 xi (wash) 手 shou (hands). Chinese grammar is even simpler in some ways. For instance, the Chinese language does not have different forms based on gender, or singular/plural. There are some differences between Chinese and English, but it is not hard to trace the clue and bridge the gap.

A major difference between the two languages is that there are a lot of measure words in Chinese. The place and use of measure words in Chinese are similar to how the English word 'piece' is placed and used in the phrase 'a piece of paper'. Although most objects ('paper', in this case) have their own measure words, objects of the same kind or with similar characteristics use the same measure words. For instance, 纸 zhi (paper), 报纸 baozhi (newspaper), 照片 zhaopian (photo), 画儿 huar (painting) and 邮票 youpiao (stamp) share the measure word 张 zhang (piece). Even 床 chuang (bed) uses the same measure word, 'zhang', because those objects all have a flat surface.

Chinese grammar can therefore be simply summarized as follows:

1. **No conjugations:** each verb only has one form, and for that matter: no irregular verbs
2. **No tenses:** use of particles to express if an action takes place in the past, present or future. Again, the verb form never changes in function of the tense
3. **No articles:** no such thing as 'the' and 'a', no le/la, no der/die/das
4. **No plurals:** quantifiers before the noun, or simply the context, will make clear whether we are talking in singular or in plural
5. **No gender:** no masculine, feminine or neuter words
6. **No cases:** since articles don't exist, and nouns can't be changed anyway, it's impossible to have akkusativ/genetiv/dativ in Chinese
7. **No declinations of adjectives by number or gender:** just like nouns, adjectives never change
8. **Fixed sentence patterns, no inversion:** fixed pattern of subject – verb – object