

Chinese **USING**

A GUIDE TO CONTEMPORARY USAGE

YVONNE LI WALLS AND JAN W. WALLS

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Using Chinese

This is a guide to Chinese usage for students who have already acquired the basics of the language and wish to extend their knowledge. Unlike conventional grammars, it addresses many aspects of Chinese language usage, such as letter writing, idioms, proverbs, and riddles. It also provides new and recent words, including internet vocabulary, which enables students to understand and properly use the most up-to-date expressions alongside everyday language. Useful sections on common social interactions are included, along with an invaluable guide to the finer nuances of body language. Clear, readable, and easy to consult, this is an essential reference for learners seeking access to one of the world's most important languages.

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1 Varieties of language and register

1.1 Introduction

It has been several centuries since non-native speakers around the world first began systematically learning the Chinese language. In imperial China, the Jesuit order published Chinese language textbooks for use by their missionaries. Chinese has been widely taught in universities and colleges in the West for many decades now, and the demand for Chinese language instruction has been increasing steadily, to the point where it is now taught in many secondary and even primary schools in Europe and North America. If grammar is considered in the narrower sense of rules for the expression of differences in case, number, person, tense, and voice, then Chinese is said by some to have little or very simplistic grammar. As a result, learning Chinese often has been believed to be a tedious exercise in rote memorization of words and expressions. However, as a human language, Chinese definitely has a well-ordered structure and organization, and therefore has a grammar.

From the learner–user’s point of view, Chinese grammar also needs systematic treatment, so that learning can become a more logical and orderly process. Once basic grammar has been mastered in a number of conventional contexts, one must proceed to develop command of a more extensive vocabulary in a variety of different situations and contexts in order to truly master it. It is the intention of *Using Chinese* to address these and a variety of other issues, with a view towards making the learning of Chinese a more sensible and pleasant experience. In this book, the target language is modern standard Chinese, 现代汉语 xiàndài Hànyǔ, also called Mandarin, the standard spoken form: 普通话 pǔtōnghuà; the standardized (generally known as the simplified) character form, 简体字 jiǎntǐzì, is used for the written script; and the Romanization adopted is the 拼音 pīnyīn system, or more officially: the Scheme for the Chinese Phonetic Alphabet, which has been officially used in China since 1958 and has now become the most widely used

Romanization system in textbooks and dictionaries around the world. On January 1, 2001, “The Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Standard Spoken and Written Language” went into effect. In this law the above-mentioned spoken, written, and Romanization forms are proclaimed as the standard.

The Chinese language, 中文 Zhōngwén, has a written history that can be traced back to about the middle of the second millennium BCE. It is one of two branches of the Sino-Tibetan family of languages and is used by the Han Chinese, 汉族 Hànzú, who make up 91.59% of China’s 1.3 billion people, and by many Chinese who live elsewhere on every inhabited continent and on major islands around the world, estimated at around 30 million. The other 8.41% of the population in China speak one of many minority nationality languages, such as Mongolian, Tibetan, Uyghur, Dai, Naxi, Korean. The Chinese language in its many dialect forms is the native tongue of more people than any other language in the world, English being the second most widely spoken native tongue. Chinese is also one of the six official languages of the United Nations, the others being English, Arabic, French, Russian, and Spanish. Mandarin, 普通话 pǔtōnghuà, the standard language of China, is the native dialect of about 71% of its population, and is also spoken by educated speakers of other dialects. Mandarin is also the official language in Taiwan, and is one of the official languages in Singapore. In its broadest sense the Chinese language refers to all of the Chinese “dialects,” so called because although they all read and write the same characters for the same meaning, their pronunciation of the same characters may differ as greatly as the Romance languages of Europe differ in their pronunciation of the same Latin root words, or their pronunciation of the Arabic numerals. The Chinese language, in both its written and spoken aspects, has been evolving for several millennia, but most historical linguistics scholars would say that the “modern Chinese” (Mandarin) era began around the time of the early Qing Dynasty (1644–1911).

There are a number of Chinese terms for the Chinese language: “汉语 Hànyǔ” meaning “Han language” and “中文 Zhōngwén,” a more general term meaning “Chinese language” and “中国话 Zhōngguó huà” meaning “Chinese speech.” There are also different terms used for what we call “Mandarin”: “北方话 běifānghuà” meaning “northern speech”; “普通话 pǔtōnghuà” meaning “common speech” in mainland China; “华语 Huáyǔ” meaning “Chinese language,” mostly used by overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, and “国语 guóyǔ” meaning “national language” used mostly in Taiwan.

1.2 The Chinese language and its distribution

1.2.1 Modern Chinese

When we speak of the “modern Chinese language,” 现代汉语 xiàndài Hànyǔ, or Mandarin 普通话 pǔtōnghuà, we refer to the

language that is based on the northern dialect, taking Beijing pronunciation as its standard and taking well-known vernacular writings as the standard for its grammar. The origin of the term that we translate as “Mandarin” Chinese appears to be the older term “官话 guānhuà” which literally means “official speech.” The English word “mandarin” is traceable to a Sanskrit term “mantrin,” meaning “minister.” The distinction between “Chinese language” and “Mandarin” is not just an academic one, for you may hear a Cantonese speaker say “Ngóh sik góng Jùngmàhn, ngh-sik góng gwok-yúeh,” meaning “I speak Chinese, but not Mandarin.” This makes sense when we consider that Mandarin is one of several dialects, all of which are “Chinese.” While most urban Chinese today will be able to speak, or at least understand, Mandarin, it is spoken as the native tongue of Chinese in the area north of the Changjiang (Yangtze) River, and west of Hunan and Guangdong provinces.

Apart from Mandarin, other important dialect groups include: Wú (including Shanghaiese), spoken in Jiangsu Province and Zhejiang Province; Mǐn (Fukienese), spoken in Fujian Province, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia; Yuè (Cantonese), spoken in Guangdong, Guangxi, Hong Kong, North America, and elsewhere by the Chinese diaspora; and Kèjīā (Hakka), spoken mostly in Guangdong and Jiangxi provinces. Following the growth of more universal education and mass media over the past century, Mandarin is now spoken by most educated Chinese in most cities throughout China.

1.2.2 Regional differences in spoken Chinese – the dialects

Most people living in northern, northeastern, and southwestern China, amounting to about three-quarters of all Chinese, are native speakers of a Mandarin sub-dialect: Beijing Mandarin, Shandong Mandarin, Sichuan Mandarin, etc. As mentioned above, the remaining quarter of the Chinese-speaking population is composed of about seven other major dialects, which mostly are mutually unintelligible. Their differences in pronunciation might be compared to the differences between French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese among the Romance languages.

1.2.3 Regional differences – within Mandarin

Regional differences in pronunciation of Mandarin within China are as great or greater than the varieties of English as spoken in England, Scotland, Ireland, Australia, the United States, and Canada. The difference between a Mandarin sub-dialect and a dialect is that sub-dialect speakers can mostly understand each other’s speech, while the different dialects are often mutually unintelligible.

Major Chinese dialect distribution:

Dialect	Pop. (%)	Representative place where dialect is spoken	Region where dialect is spoken
普通话 pǔtōnghuà	71	北京 Běijīng	N of the Chángjiāng River 长江 & SW China
吴 Wú	9	上海 Shànghǎi	上海, 苏州, 杭州 Shànghǎi, Sūzhōu, Hángzhōu
湘 Xiāng	5	长沙 Chángshā	湖南 Húnán
粤 Yuè (Cantonese)	5	广州 Guǎngzhōu	广西, 广东 Guǎngxī, Guǎngdōng
闽 Mǐn (Fukienese)	4	North: 福州 Fúzhōu South: 厦门 Xiàmén	福建, 台湾, 海南 Fújiàn, Tǎiwān, Hǎinán
客家 Kèjiā (Hakka)	4	梅县 Méixiàn	Mostly in Guǎngdōng, Jiāngxī, and Hakka communities in SE China
赣 Gàn	2	南昌 Nánchāng	江西 Jiāngxī

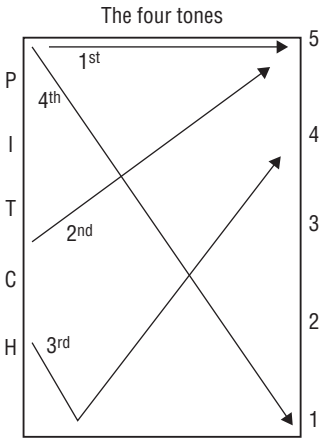
1.2.4 The spoken language

Spoken Chinese is an analytic, or isolating, language meaning that the vast majority of all morphemes, or syllables, are meaningful units of speech, which may in turn be combined with other meaningful syllables to form new words. There are only around 400 syllables in Modern Standard Chinese. Below are a few examples to illustrate the difference in the “feel” of a language whose words are mostly made up of meaningful syllables.

English	Chinese
crane	起重机 qǐ-zhòng-jī (raise-heavy-machine)
department store	百货公司 bǎi-huò-gōng-sī (100-goods-public-managed)
elevator	电梯 diàn-tī (electric-stairs)
encyclopedia	百科全书 bǎi-kē-quán-shū (100-category-total-book)

English	Chinese
escalator	滚梯 gǔn-tī (rolling-stairs)
library	图书馆 tú-shū-guǎn (chart-book-building)
microscope	显微镜 xiǎn-wēi-jìng (reveal-tiny-lens)
ophthalmology	眼科 yǎn-kē (eye department)
pedometer	计步器 jì-bù-qì (count-step-tool)
radio	收音机 shōu-yīn-jī (receive-sound-machine)
surgery	外科 wài-kē (external-department)
university	大学 dà-xué (major-learning)
telescope	望远镜 wàng-yuǎn-jìng (gaze-far-lens)
zebra	斑马 bān-mǎ (striped-horse)

All varieties (i.e. dialects or sub-dialects) of the Chinese language are tonal. Each Mandarin syllable has four tones, although not all toned syllables are meaningful syllables in modern Chinese.



There is also a “neutral” tone, which could be considered as a fifth tone.

First tone (high-level):	mā, “妈, mother”
Second tone (high-rising):	má, “麻, hemp”
Third tone (dip-low-rising):	mǎ, “马, horse”
Fourth tone (falling):	mà, “骂, scold”
Neutral tone (“toneless”):	ma, 吗, verbalized question mark

These tonal distinctions are “built into” each spoken syllable, with or without reference to the Chinese character that would be used to

write each different syllable. For example, the difference between “买菜 mǎi cài” and “卖菜 mài cài” is significant: the former means “buy groceries,” while the latter means “sell groceries.” “妈妈骂马 Māma mà mǎ” means “Mom scolds the horse,” while “马骂妈妈 Mǎ mà Māma” means “The horse scolds Mom.” Actually the meaning of the sample sentence “Māma mà mǎ,” depending upon the context of the utterance, may be more general or more specific, and either singular or plural:

“(The) Mom(s) scold(s) (the) horse(s).”

In the context of speaking about things that happened yesterday, the utterance “Māma mà mǎ” would mean:

“(The) Mom(s) scolded (the) horse(s).”

Verbs are not conjugated in Chinese. If it is not clear whether we are talking about something in the past, present, or future, we may add a time expression before the verb or at the beginning of the utterance: for example, “妈妈昨天骂马 Māma zuótiān mà mǎ,” or “昨天妈妈骂马 Zuótiān māma mà mǎ” where “昨天 zuótiān, yesterday” shows it is a past action. Thus there is no need for verbalized declension to show past, present, and future tense of verbs in Chinese, since “yesterday” (or “today” or “tomorrow” or “last year”), which must always be expressed or implied before the verb, removes the need for the addition of tense markers in verbs.

Nor is there any need to verbalize distinctions between singular and plural forms of nouns. If it is necessary to refer specifically to more than one of a noun, it may be preceded by a specific number, or by “some,” or “a few,” or “many.” Once you have uttered a number or a pluralizer like “several,” then it is perfectly clear that the noun which follows has been pluralized, so there is no need to mark it any further: 书 shū, book or books; 一本书 yìběn shū, one book; 两本书 liǎngběn shū, “two book”; 很多书 hěnduō shū, “many book”; 几本书 jǐběn shū, “a few book,” etc., is every bit as clear as “one book, two books, many books or a few books.”

One way to turn an indicative sentence into an interrogative sentence is simply to add the interrogative particle (verbalized question marker) “吗 ma” at the end of the sentence. Thus, to ask the question “Does/Do Mom(s) scold(s) (the) horse(s)?” we may simply say: “妈妈骂马吗? Māma mà mǎ ma?”

1.2.5 The written language and writing system

When writing their language, Chinese speakers use a non-alphabetical script called “characters, 字 zì.” 中华字海 Zhōnghuá zìhǎi, *Sea of Chinese Characters* (1994), contains 85,568 characters’ entries, 3,500 of which are used the most frequently. In China, urban people are considered literate if they have mastered 2,000 of the most frequently used characters. In the countryside, the number is 1,500. However, a well-educated person should know 5,000 to 7,000 characters.

Most Chinese characters can be identified as belonging to one of the following categories:

1. Pictograms such as:

木	mù, tree
山	shān, mountain
水	shuǐ, water
人	rén, person
日	rì, sun
月	yuè, moon
马	mǎ, horse
2. Ideograms such as:

上	shàng, above
下	xià, below
凸	tū, protruding
凹	āo, concave
二	èr, two
三	sān, three
3. Meaningful compounds such as:

从	cóng, follow (person following a person)
旦	dàn, dawn (sun above the horizon)
林	lín, woods (two trees)
森	sēn, forest (three trees)
晶	jīng, bright (three suns), also means “crystal”
众	zhòng, crowd (three people)
4. Ideophonetic compounds such as:

沐	mù, bathe: has something to do with “water, 氵,” and sounds something like “木 mù, wood” = “mù,” “bathe”
栋	dòng, pillar: has something to do with “wood, 木,” and sounds something like “东 dōng, east” = “dòng,” “pillar”
晴	qíng, fair: has something to do with “sun, 日,” and sounds something like “青 qīng, blue/green” = “qíng,” “fair” (weather)
清	qīng, clear: has something to do with “water, 氵,” and sounds something like “青 qīng, blue/green” = “qīng,” “clear” or “pure”
请	qǐng, request: has something to do with “words, 讠,” and sounds something like “青 qīng, blue/green” = “qǐng,” “ask,” or “invite”

About 94% of all characters used today are either meaningful compounds or ideophonetic compounds, the latter being the great majority. The remaining characters are either pictographs or ideographs. Therefore we may say that most Chinese characters are neither completely phonetic nor completely ideographic, but rather, they contain a “semantic hint” and a “phonetic hint.”

1.3 Overview of register in Chinese

When linguists speak of “register” in a language, they refer to a subset of a language used for a particular purpose or in a particular

social setting. The famous linguistics scholar M. A. K. Halliday (1964) identified three broadly defined variables that help us understand different types of register in a language: field (the subject matter); tenor (the participants and their relationships); and mode (the channel of communication – spoken, written, chatroom, etc.). Martin Joos (1962) describes five styles: frozen (printed, unchanging phrases, such as canonical quotations); formal (one-way participation, no interruption, ritualistic); consultative (two-way participation, interruptions common); casual (in-group friends, ellipsis and slang common, interruptions common); and intimate (non-public, private vocabulary). Quirk *et al.* (1985) distinguish five different registers of formality in English, although they use the term “attitude” rather than register: very formal, formal, neutral, informal, and very informal. Such distinctions would seem to be quite helpful to understand how register works in Chinese.

Native speakers of North American English usually are not so conscious of the need to switch speech registers when talking with people of different social distance, different professions, different age groups, different degrees of closeness, or in different social contexts. Perhaps the implicit assumptions of equality and individuality among modern English speakers are not conducive to a focus on relationships, which is precisely what is required to trigger a switch in speech register.

1.3.1 Illustrations of register

You (normal)	你 nǐ
You (polite)	您 nín
My father (normal)	我父亲 wǒ fùqīn
My father (normal, less formal)	我爸爸 wǒ bàba
Your father (more formal)	您父亲 nín fùqīn
My mother (normal)	我母亲 wǒ mǔqīn
My mother (normal, less formal)	我妈妈 wǒ māma
Your mother (more formal)	您母亲 nín mǔqīn
To visit a friend (normal)	看朋友 kàn péngyou
To visit the teacher (more formal)	拜访老师 bài fǎng lǎoshī
To eat at a restaurant (informal)	吃馆子 chī guǎnzi
To eat at a restaurant (more formal)	在饭馆儿吃饭 zài fànguǎnr chīfàn
To go by taxi (informal)	打的去 dǎdī qù
To go by taxi (normal)	坐出租车去 zuò chūzūchē qù
To order drinks (informal)	要喝的 yào hēde
To order beverages (more formal)	点饮料 diǎn yǐnliào
What would you like to drink? (informal)	喝点儿什么? Hē diǎnr shénme?
What would you like to drink? (more formal)	您喝点儿什么饮料? Nín hē diǎnr shénme yǐnliào?

How old are you? (to children)	你几岁了? Nǐ jǐsuì le?
How old are you? (to adults)	你多大了? Nǐ duōdà le?
How old are you? (to older people)	您多大岁数了? Nín duōdà suìshu le?
How old are you? (polite, to older people)	请问, 您多大年纪? Qǐngwèn, nín duōdà niánji?
How old are you? (extremely polite)	请问, 您贵庚? Qǐngwèn, nín guìgēng?
How are you? (informal)	怎么样啊? Zěnmeyàng a?
How are you? (normal)	好吗? Hǎo ma?
How are you? (normal)	你好! Nǐ hǎo!
How are you? (more polite)	您好! Nín hǎo!
My wife (to familiar people)	我那口子 wǒ nèikǒuzi
My wife (to familiar people)	我老爱 wǒ lǎo'ài
My wife (to familiar people)	我老伴儿 wǒ lǎobànr (also means “my husband”)
My wife (to familiar people)	孩子他妈 háizi tā mā
My wife (common in PRC)	我爱人 wǒ àiren
My wife (normal)	我妻子 wǒ qīzi
My wife (normal now)	我太太 wǒ tàitai
My husband (to familiar people)	我那口子 wǒ nèikǒuzi
My husband (to familiar people)	我老爱 wǒ lǎo'ài
My husband (to familiar people)	我老伴儿 wǒ lǎobànr (also means “My wife”)
My husband (to familiar people)	孩子他爸 háizi tā bà
My husband (common in PRC)	我爱人 wǒ àiren
My husband (normal)	我丈夫 wǒ zhàngfu
My husband (normal now)	我先生 wǒ xiānsheng
Your wife (normal)	你太太 nǐ tàitai
Your wife (a bit formal)	您太太 nín tàitai
Your wife (formal)	您夫人 nín fūren
Your husband (normal)	你丈夫 nǐ zhàngfu
Your husband (a bit formal)	您丈夫 nín zhàngfu
Your husband (formal)	您先生 nín xiānsheng
Teacher Liu (polite, to a teacher)	刘老师 Liú lǎoshī
Master Liu (polite, to skilled worker)	刘师傅 Liú shīfu
Section Chief Liu (formal)	刘科长 Liú kēzhǎng
Liu (older than speaker, familiar)	老刘 lǎo Liú (old Liu)
Liu (younger than speaker, familiar)	小刘 xiǎo Liú (young Liu)
Mr. Liu (normal, formal)	刘先生 Liú xiānsheng
Come in! (impolite, command)	进来! Jìnlái!
Come in! (informal)	进来吧。Jìnlai ba.
Please come in! (formal)	请进。Qǐng jìn.

2 Vocabulary and usage

2.1 Parts of speech

Before they became aware of non-Chinese concepts of “parts of speech” in the late nineteenth century, Chinese distinguished primarily between “notional” words, 实词 *shící*, literally “substantive words,” and “function” words, 虚词 *xūcí*, literally “empty words.” The first Western-style grammar was that of Mǎ Jiànzhōng 马建忠 (1844–1900), the 1898 马氏文通 *Mǎshì wéntōng*, *Basic Principles for Writing*. This very influential work introduced Chinese terminology for parts of speech based on Latin, and cited classical Chinese passages extensively to document short statements about syntax. The book was revolutionary and remains a primary work. Over the last century Chinese grammatical concepts such as nouns, 名词 *míngcí*, literally “name words”; verbs, 动词 *dòngcí*, literally “motion words”; adjectives, 形容词 *xíngróngcí*, literally “description words”; adverbs, 副词 *fùcí*, literally “assisting words”; prepositions, 介词 *jiècí*, literally “interface words”; conjunctions, 连词 *liáncí*, literally “connecting words,” etc., have become standard grammatical terms.

The most commonly used Chinese terms for what we consider to be parts of speech are:

名词	<i>míngcí</i>	noun: 马 <i>mǎ</i> , horse
专有名词	<i>zhuānyǒu míngcí</i>	proper noun: 马玉婷 <i>Mǎ Yùtíng</i>
动词	<i>dòngcí</i>	verb: 骂 <i>mà</i> , to scold, to curse
代词	<i>dàicí</i>	pronoun: 她 <i>tā</i> , she
形容词	<i>xíngróngcí</i>	adjective: 美 <i>měi</i> , beautiful
副词	<i>fùcí</i>	adverb: 很 <i>hěn</i> , very
能愿动词	<i>néngyuàn dòngcí</i>	modal verb: 可以 <i>kěyǐ</i> , can; may
介词	<i>jiècí</i>	preposition: 替 <i>tì</i> , for
量词	<i>liàngcí</i>	measure word: 个 <i>gè</i> , as in 两个人, two people

数词	shùcí	numeral: 三 sān, 3
连词	liáncí	connecting word/conjunction: 和 hé, and
助词	zhùcí	particle: 了 le, perfective aspect particle
拟声词	nǐshēngcí	onomatopoeia: 嗡嗡 wēngwēng, buzzing sound
主语	zhǔyǔ	subject: 妈妈骂马 Māma mà mǎ (Māma = subject)
谓语	wèiyǔ	predicate: 妈妈骂马 (mà mǎ = predicate)
宾语	bīnyǔ	object: 妈妈骂马 (mǎ = object of verb 骂 mà)
补语	bǔyǔ	complement: 马跑得快 (得快 de kuài = complement)
陈述句	chénshùjù	declarative sentence, statement: 妈妈骂马 Māma mà mǎ, Mom scolds the horse.
疑问句	yíwènjù	interrogative sentence: 妈妈骂马吗? Māma mà mǎ ma?, Is Mom scolding the horse?
祈使句	qíshǐjù	imperative sentence: 别骂马! Bié mà mǎ!, Don't scold the horse!
感叹句	gǎntànjù	exclamatory sentence: 我的妈! Wǒde mā!, Oh my goodness!

2.2 Word formation

Chinese words are formed in a great variety of ways. There are simple words, which are monosyllabic and written with a single Chinese character such as “person, 人 rén,” or polysyllabic and written with more than one character such as “command, 命令 mìnglìng”; and there are compound words such as “a switch, 开关 kāiguān,” literally “open–close” or “happy, 开心 kāixīn,” literally, “open–heart,” or “pistachio nut, 开心果 kāixīn’guǒ,” literally “[split–] open–heart–fruit.”

2.2.1 Compounding

Listed below are some of the most characteristic ways of forming compound words:

Co-ordinate compounds	保卫 bǎowèi, protect, literally “protect–defend”
Attribute–head subordinate	电灯 diàndēng, electric light, literally “electric lamp”

Head-referent subordinate	吃力 chīlì, require strenuous effort, literally “eat-up strength”
Head-modifier subordinate	打倒 dǎdǎo, topple, literally “strike fall”
Referent-head subordinate	自豪 zìháo, pride oneself in, literally “self-proud”
Head-measure subordinate	车辆 chēliàng, vehicle, car; literally “vehicle + measure word used for vehicles”
Prefix-plus-root	老张 Lǎo Zhāng, Old Zhang (addressing or referring to a familiar person whose surname is Zhang)
Root-plus-suffix	桌子 zhuōzi, table; literally “table” + diminutive suffix “zi”
Reduplicated compounds	车车 chēche, little car or buggy (children’s talk)
Abbreviated compounds	高教 gāojiào, higher education (from 高等教育 gāoděng jiàoyù)

2.2.2 Prefixes

Prefixes like 老 lǎo, old and 小 xiǎo, young, are often used before names of close friends and associates, such as 老张 Lǎo Zhāng, (Old) Zhang and 小王 Xiǎo Wáng, (Young) Wang, or before nouns, as in 老师 lǎoshī, teacher or 老乡 lǎoxiāng, fellow villager. Some compound verbs may consist of a verbal prefix plus an action, such as 打开 dǎkāi, to open; 打扫 dǎsǎo, to sweep; 打扮 dǎbàn, to apply makeup; 打听 dǎtīng, to make enquiry, and 打算 dǎsuàn, to plan. The English suffix “-able” is expressed by using the verbal prefix 可 kě, may, as with 可惜 kěxī, regrettable; 可喜 kěxǐ, rejoiceable; 可悲 kěbēi, lamentable; 可怜 kělián, pitiable; 可恶 kěwù, detestable; 可能 kěnéng, possible; and 可笑 kěxiào, laughable.

2.2.3 Suffixes

The most common suffixes are:

儿 er	花儿, 刀儿, 棍儿, 瓶儿, 头儿, 画儿, 这儿, 那儿, 哪儿, etc.
子 zi	刀子, 叉子, 桌子, 面子, 法子, 帽子, 孩子, 儿子, 拍子, etc.
头 tou	里头, 外头, 上头, 下头, 后头, 前头, 斧头, 砖头, 木头, etc.
者 zhě	读者, 学者, 强者, 前者, 后者, 个人主义者, etc.
家 jiā	作家, 画家, 专家, 文学家, 书法家, 科学家, etc.

员 yuán	教员, 研究员, 演员, 售货员, 炊事员, 运动员, etc.
士 shì	学士, 硕士, 博士, 男士, 女士, 护士, etc.
们 men	我们, 你们, 他们, 她们, 朋友们, 先生们, etc.
性 xìng	积极性, 永久性, 政治性, 娱乐性, 独特性, etc.
化 huà	绿化, 深化, 石化, 机械化, 老化, 电脑化, 正常化, etc.

Verbal aspect particles such as “了 le, perfective aspect,” “着 zhe, progressive aspect” and “过 guò, experiential aspect” may also be regarded as suffixes, but will be treated in this book as aspect particles.

2.2.4 New words

Words imported from non-Chinese languages are created using one of four primary strategies:

1. Creating a new Chinese character using a semantic component related to the meaning of the new word, plus a phonetic component whose pronunciation is similar to that of the word being translated. Examples would be the word for the chemical element “erbium” – 铒 ěr, which has to do with “metal,” and sounds like the “er” of “erbium”; another example is “magnesium” – 镁 měi, which has to do with “metal,” and sounds like the “ma” of “magnesium.”
2. Transliterating the sound of the polysyllabic foreign word into a series of Chinese characters used for their phonetic value only. One example from the early twentieth century would be the first term used for the Western concept of “democracy” – 德谟克拉西 démókèlāxī, whose components “virtue-plan-overcome-tug-west” representing no Chinese concept, are recognized as a transliteration of a foreign concept. Another early twentieth-century example would be the transliteration of “inspiration” – 烟士批里纯 yānshìpīlǐchún, literally: “mist-scholar-approve-hamlet-pure.” Both of the above examples later were “domesticated” using the next translation technique below.
3. Translating the meaning of the foreign word into a meaningful Chinese compound of two or more characters. Examples would be the term now used for “democracy,” 民主 mínzhǔ, whose components mean “people-sovereign,” and “inspiration,” 灵感 línggǎn, whose components mean “spirit-feeling.”
4. Combining translation with transliteration. An example is the Chinese word for “ice cream” – 冰激凌 bīngjīlíng or 冰淇淋 bīngqílín, in which “bīng” means “ice,” and “jīlíng” (“surge” + “encroach”) or “qílín” (“Qí River” + “drench”) represent the sound of “cream” in English. Other examples would be: “beer” – 啤酒 píjiǔ, in which “pí” represents the sound of “beer,” and “jiǔ” means “alcoholic drink”; and “internet” – 因特网 yīntèwǎng, in

which “yīntè” represents the sound of “inter,” and “wǎng” means “net.”

2.3 Homonyms

In English, a homonym is a word which has the same spelling and pronunciation as another word but a different meaning. A few examples are: “ball: a sphere; a dance”; “band: something wrapped around the arm; musical group”; “box: a crate; engage in fisticuffs”; “bank: a financial institution; the edge of a river,” etc. In Chinese, then, we might say that a homonym is one character which has only one pronunciation, but more than one meaning.

Because there are relatively fewer syllables in Chinese, even with their tonal distinctions, we would expect to see more different meanings attached to a typical Chinese word than we might expect to a typical English word. A good example would be “放 fàng” whose most basic meaning is “to let go of something, to release something.” To “put” or to “place” is a logical extension of “release,” as in: 把书放在桌子上 bǎ shū fàngzai zhuōzishang, Put the book on the table. Seen in this light, other extensions become quite reasonable, as shown in the following illustrations, each requiring different English words to express the same meaning:

放 fàng

set free, release

佛教提倡放生。

Fójiào tíchàng fàngshēng.

Buddhism advocates freeing captive animals.

put, place

她把衣服放在洗衣机里。

Tā bǎ yīfu fàngzai xǐyījī lǐ.

She put the clothes in the washer.

let off, give out

酒发酵时会放出气泡。

Jiǔ fājiàoshí huì fàngchū qìpào.

When wine is fermented it gives off bubbles of gas.

put out to pasture

放牛；放羊

fàng niú; fàng yáng

put cows out to pasture; put sheep out to pasture

expand; make longer/larger

这条裤子能不能给我放长一寸？

Zhètiáo kùzi néngbuneng gěi wǒ fàngcháng yícùn?

Can you lengthen these pants by an inch for me?

blossom, bloom

百花齐放

Bǎihuā qífàng.

“Let a hundred flowers blossom” (Let different views be aired)

lend money, make loans

放款是银行生利的方式之一。

Fàngkuǎn shì yínháng shēnglì de fāngshì zhīyī.

Loans are one of the ways a bank earns a profit.

add something to something else

你喝咖啡放不放糖？

Nǐ hē kāfēi fàngbùfàng táng?

Do you add sugar to your coffee?

Another good illustration of the same point would be “毛 máo,” which originally means “body hair,” which is short and fine, as opposed to “发 fà, hair on the head,” which grows longer. In light of the principle of metaphorical extension, it becomes easy to understand the connection between “tiny hair,” “down,” “wool,” “feather,” “mildew,” “small,” “careless,” “unfinished,” and even “alarmed” (hair standing on end), as illustrated in the following utterances, each requiring different English words to translate:

毛 máo

hair, wool, down, feather

一般的洋人身上长的毛比中国人多。

Yībānde yáng rén shēnshang zhǎngde máo bǐ Zhōngguórén duō.

Westerners generally have more body hair than Chinese.

mildew, mold

这干酪已经长毛了！

Zhè gānlào yǐjīng zhǎngmáo le!

This cheese is already moldy!

little, small

他才不是大人，是个毛孩子！

Tā cái bùshì dàrén, shìge máoháizi!

He's no adult. He's just a little kid!

semifinished (product)

毛铁就是生铁的另外一个说法。

Máotiě jiùshì shēngtiě de lìngwài yige shuōfa.

“Rough iron” is another way of saying “pig iron.”

gross (profit or income)

毛收入当然比净收入多啦。

Máoshōurù dāngrán bǐ jìngshōurù duō la.

Gross income is greater than net income, of course.

careless, crude, rash
喂！做事要小心点儿，别那么毛糙了！
Wei! Zuòshì yào xiǎoxīn diǎnr, bié nàme máocao le!
Hey! Be more careful with your work, don't be so careless!

alarmed, scared
她一看见厂长就发毛了。
Tā yíkànjian chǎngzhǎng jiù fāmáo le.
She became frightened (got goose flesh) at the sight of the factory manager.

dime (1/10th of a yuan)
两毛五而已？真便宜！
Liǎngmáowǔ éryǐ? Zhēn piányi!
Only twenty-five cents? That's really cheap!

This phenomenon of extended metaphorical usage should be quite familiar to English speakers when we think of words like “run,” whose core meaning is “to move at a speed faster than a walk, never having both or all the feet on the ground at the same time.” Put “run” in different contexts, and it will require entirely different words to translate it into Chinese. For example, “the Yankees lead by one run: 洋基棒球队领先一分 Yángjī bàngqiúduì lǐngxiān yīfēn,” “to run a business: 经营企业 jīngyíng qǐyè,” “to run out of money: 钱用光了 qián yòngguāng le,” “to run up a huge bill: 开支的累积很大 kāizhīde lěiji hěn dà,” and “a run of bad luck: 一连串的坏运气 yìliánchuànde huàiyùnqi.” All the previous examples require different translations in Chinese and none of them involve “跑 pǎo,” which is the core meaning of “run” in Chinese. Following is a small sample of common Chinese words with several different meanings, requiring different English words in translation:

走 zǒu	to flee, to walk, to leave, to run
上 shàng	above, over, on, upper; previous; to ascend, to mount; to present to one's superiors; to go (to class or to work)
下 xià	below, under, lower; next; to descend, to dismount to send down (to one's subordinates); to finish (a class or a working day)
白 bái	white; clear, pure, plain; colloquial; free of charge; vainly; wrongly written; surname

2.4 Homophones

English homophones are words which have the same sound but different meanings and different spelling, such as “air (atmosphere)” and “heir (one who inherits wealth)”; or “to,” “too,” and “two.” Chinese homophones, 同音字 tóngyīnzì, by analogy, are syllables which have the same pronunciation, but are written with different

Chinese characters and have different meanings. With a total inventory of just over 400 syllables (without considering tones) to pronounce the 2,000 or so characters needed to be basically literate in Chinese, it is statistically impossible to avoid a huge number of homophones, far more than we could ever expect to find through the vagaries of spelling words in English. In fact, any attempt to list the pǔtōnghuà homophones would amount to a pronunciation dictionary of pǔtōnghuà, so rather than list all the homophones, we shall simply take a few syllables, and list all the characters represented by each.

ān

安 ān still, quiet
 庵 ān hut, nunnery
 氨 ān ammonia
 鞍 ān saddle
 谙 ān learn by heart, be well versed in
 桉 ān eucalyptus
 鹌 ān quail

jiā

家 jiā home, house, family
 加 jiā add
 佳 jiā good, beautiful
 夹 jiā press, squeeze; clip
 嘉 jiā good, fine; praise
 袈 jiā used in “袈裟 jiāshā,” a Buddhist monk’s outerwear
 茄 jiā used in transliterated words, like “雪茄 xuějiā,” cigar
 枷 jiā cangue
 伽 jiā a Galileo unit; used in transliterated words like “瑜伽 yújiā,”
 yoga
 珈 jiā woman’s headdress in ancient China
 痂 jiā scab, crust
 跏 jiā used in “跏趺 jiāfū,” a sitting posture of a Buddhist
 迦 jiā used in transliterating names, such as “释迦牟尼
 Shìjiāmóuní,” Sakyamuni
 浹 jiā wet through
 葭 jiā tender shoot of a reed
 镓 jiā gallium

yī

一 yī one
 壹 yī one
 医 yī medicine; medical profession; doctor
 衣 yī clothing
 依 yī approach; depend on; comply with; according to
 伊 yī surname; he or she

咿 yī a character used for its sound in “咿呀 yīyā,” babble, prattle
 铱 yī iridium
 噫 yī alas
 猗 yī a character used to show exclamation in classical Chinese
 漪 yī ripples
 揖 yī bow with hands clasped together
 黟 yī a character used in a place name “Yī xiàn,” Yi County

zuò

作 zuò do, make
 做 zuò do, make, be
 坐 zuò sit, ride
 座 zuò seat; a measure word for mountains, tall buildings
 唑 zuò a character used in “噻唑 sāizuò,” thiazole
 作 zuò shame
 祚 zuò fortune
 胙 zuò sacrificial meat in the ancient times
 酢 zuò a character used in classical Chinese, “酬酢 chóuzuò,” a return toast made by a guest
 阼 zuò the stairs on the east side of the hall of a Chinese building
 柞 zuò oak
 凿 zuò certain (classic meaning); mortise

While it may be unrealistic to present a list of all the homophones in the language, we should say a few words about the prevalence and importance of the playful use of homophones by Chinese speakers. This happens in the form of punning, both verbal and graphic.

Examples of verbal punning would be:

“逃之夭夭, táo zhī yāoyāo” is an idiom meaning “to flee,” but the first character is a punning allusion to the first line of a famous folk ballad in the *Classic of Songs*, 诗经 Shījīng, “桃之夭夭,” meaning “peach tree, young and fresh.” The cleverness of this pun is in its simultaneously calling forth images of classical dignity and an undignified departure.

Domino’s Pizza, which currently dominates around 60% of the market in Taiwan, is famous for its use of puns in Chinese marketing. First, its registered Chinese corporate name is “达美乐 Dáměilè” which means “Achieving Beautiful Joy” while sounding like “Domino.” Three of the puns associated with Domino’s are:

达美乐
 dāměilè,
 打了没
 dǎle méi?

Translation: Answering the phone: “Domino’s, you called?”

饿爸爸饿, 我饿我饿
 è bàba è, wǒ è wǒ è

2882-5252

èr-bā-bā-èr wǔ-èr-wǔ-èr (Domino's phone number)

Hungry Papa hungry; I'm hungry I'm hungry

快乐颂

kuàilè sòng

Ode to Joy

快热送

kuàirè sòng

Delivered fast and hot

2.5 Homographs

Chinese homographs, 多音字 duōyīnzì, are characters that have more than one pronunciation, depending upon different meanings or their use in different character compounds. Here are some examples:

阿	ā ē	阿飞, 阿米巴, 阿姨 阿弥陀佛, 阿谀
背	bèi bēi	背书, 背后, 背景, 背面, 背叛, 背心 背包, 背带
别	bié biè	别名, 别墅, 别针, 别致, 辨别, 差别, 辞别, 个别, 永别 别扭
卜	bǔ bo	占卜, 生死未卜 萝卜, 胡萝卜
参	cān cēn shēn	参考, 参赞, 参政, 参观, 参加, 参谋, 参与 参差, 参差不齐 党参, 海参, 人参
藏	cáng zàng	藏书, 躲藏, 收藏, 蕴藏, 珍藏, 贮藏, 捉迷藏 藏族, 藏红花, 宝藏
曾	céng zēng	曾经, 不曾, 未曾 曾姓, 曾孙, 曾祖
差	chā chà chāi cī	差额, 差距, 差别, 差错, 差异 差劲, 差不多, 差不离 差遣, 差事, 出差, 公差 参差
场	cháng chǎng	场院, 一场雨 操场, 登场, 广场, 冷场, 牧场, 怯场, 现场

朝	cháo zhāo	朝阳, 朝政, 朝代, 朝鲜族, 王朝 朝气, 朝露, 朝日, 朝夕, 朝霞
称	chēng chèn	称呼, 称谓, 称谢, 称赞, 号称, 简称, 名称, 人 称, 职称, 自称, 尊称 称心, 称愿, 称职, 相称
重	chóng zhòng	重婚, 重孙, 重演, 重阳, 重奏, 重叠, 重复, 重新, 双重 重创, 重负, 重任, 重托, 重担, 重地, 重活, 重用
臭	chòu xiù	臭虫, 臭骂, 臭豆腐, 臭烘烘, 臭乎乎, 狐臭, 口臭, 腥臭, 乳臭未干 无色无臭, 臭味相投
处	chǔ chù	处女, 处世, 处暑, 处死, 处方, 处分, 处境, 处 刑, 处罚, 处理品, 相处 处所, 长处, 害处, 益处
畜	chù xù	家畜, 牲畜, 种畜, 畜肥, 畜生 畜牧, 畜产品
传	chuán zhuàn	传播, 传单, 传递, 传授, 传统, 传真, 传布, 传 教, 传神, 传染病, 失传, 谣传, 祖传 传略, 传记, 评传, 自传
创	chuàng chuāng	创刊, 创办, 创业, 创举, 创作, 创立, 创新, 创 造, 创始, 首创 创痕, 创伤, 重创
答	dā dá	答应, 答腔 答案, 答辩, 答复, 答卷, 答话, 答谢, 回答, 解 答, 问答
打	dá dǎ	一打鸡蛋 打岔, 打工, 打官司, 打行李, 打抱不平
大	dà dài	大地, 大脑, 大雪, 大城市, 大白菜, 大慈 大悲 大夫, 大黄
倒	dǎo dào	倒塌, 打倒, 颠倒 倒立, 倒流, 倒影, 倒转, 倒栽葱
的	de dí dì	似的, 是的, 有的是 的确, 的确良 目的