Jimmy Du’s Essential Chinese
Jimmy Du’s Natural Language Works

By
Zhengming Du
Jimmy Du’s Essential Chinese
Jimmy Du’s Essential Chinese:  
Jimmy Du’s Natural Language Works

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INTRODUCTION

WELCOME TO JIMMY DU’S ESSENTIAL CHINESE OF JIMMY DU
NATURAL LANGUAGE WORKS

This is a specially designed self-teaching course to help you master Mandarin Chinese in the shortest time possible. We promise you will naturally “pick it up” if you just spend a little time following this course while relaxing at home, taking a walk, commuting to work or travelling. You don’t have to sit in a classroom, consult the dictionary, study grammar or do any written exercises. This least-effort principle is based on the understanding that we human beings all have an innate aptitude for picking up any human language, native or foreign. All you have to do is keep learning what you can immediately understand, imitate, and put to use. The least effort means the highest efficiency. For this reason, we have provided easy-to-understand explanations and translations of everything in the text. The text contents are arranged in a natural order beginning from the most essential words, phrases and short sentences, all carefully selected so that they will not only serve as a basis for you to expand your vocabulary, but also help you learn the nature of Chinese language and how it works. On this solid foundation, you will find no difficulty in developing your comprehension of more complicated structures and, ultimately, your fluency.

OK! Let’s begin!

Preparation: Chinese Pinyin Spelling and Pronunciation

Standard Mandarin Chinese is also called Putonghua, which means “common speech”. As you come to learn it, you actually may not encounter as much difficulty as you expected because the letters used in Chinese Pinyin for spelling words are the same as those used in English, with only one exception: the letter “ü”. This “ü” is written as the letter “u” but with two dots on the top as in German. In computer input with
Pinyin software the key used for it is “v”, a letter which by coincidence is not used in Chinese Pinyin spelling.

Chinese Pinyin letters have two categories, the initials and finals. The initials are the same as the English consonant letters, and the finals use the English vowel letters. The two are usually combined to spell a word. This means that Chinese is basically an open-syllable language in which words will end with a vowel sound, as in Italian or Japanese.

There are only three exceptions to this general rule. They are the nasal sound letters n and ng and the retroflex sound r. Since many Pinyin letters are pronounced very much like those in English, we only have to make a few notes on those exceptions that are essentially different.

Let’s first go through the six basic finals.

Letter a, a – a
Letter o, o – o
Letter e, e – e
Letter i, i – i
Letter u, u – u
Letter u with two dots on the top, ü – ü

Now we can try some examples of Pinyin by combining each of them with an initial letter. Let’s pick out letter o and letter e for example.

b, o, bo
p, o, po
m, o, mo
f, o, fo
d, e, de
t, e, te
n, e, ne
l, e, le
g, e, ge
k, e, ke
h, e, he

We can see that these initial letters have the same pronunciation as the English consonant letters. However, since Chinese is an open-syllable language, they will end with the additional vowel sound of o or e even if they stand alone just as Pinyin letter names.

Ok. Now let’s come to some initials that are somewhat different from their English counterpart letters.
Letter z, z – z. It is pronounced as “ds” as in the English “beds” or “words”.

Letter c, c – c. It is pronounced as “ts” as in “its” or “let’s”.

Letter s, s – s. It has the same pronunciation as in English, just as in “speak” or “say”.

Listen and repeat. And pay attention to the ending of these letters as open syllables.

z, z – z

Letter j, j – j. It is pronounced somewhat like the English “g” in “Jesus” or “jeep”

Letter q, q. It is pronounced somewhat like the English beginning consonant in “cheese” or “cheap”.

Letter x, x. It is pronounced similar to the beginning consonant as in the English “sheep”.

However, what is special in the pronunciation of these three letters—j, q, x-- is that they are actually articulated between the teeth and the tongue tip. Let’s listen again.

Letters j, q, x, j (i), q (i), x (i)

Now let’s learn to pronounce the letter r in Pinyin, r–r. It has two different pronunciations. As a Pinyin initial it is pronounced as in “pleasure” or “measure”; but when placed at the end of a vowel sound, it is the same with the American English retroflex, as in “worker” or “marker”. This is an exception to the rule that consonants will generally be in the initial position. Now listen and repeat.

Letter r in the initial position, r – r

Letter r in the end position (as an exception to the rule that only vowels are used to end a syllable in Chinese), r – r (er)

Ok. Let’s go on.

Letter w, w – w, pronounced somewhat as in English “woo” or “wool” but with the beginning consonant bearing more friction of the lips.

Letter y, y – y, pronounced similar to that in the English “yeast” in fermentation.

Now we see that these two Pinyin initial letters are pronounced exactly as other two final letters that are counterparts of the English letters u and i. For this reason, when we spell a word in pinyin that has either w or u, or either y or i, both letters will be written.

Ok. Now we have learned the basic single letters, let’s have a review to make sure we remember them. Listen to repeat.
Apart from these single letters that may be a little difficult in Pinyin pronunciation, there are also a few combinations that deserve our attention. Let’s listen and repeat three such combinations in the initial position.

combination of c and h, ch
combination of s and h, sh
combination of z and h, zh – zh

Of these three the first two are comparable to their English counterparts but in Pinyin they are pronounced with the tongue tip curled up.

ch – ch; sh – sh.
The Pinyin combination of z and h doesn’t exist in English. It is somewhat like the consonant sound in the English names “George” and “Joe” but pronounced in Chinese with the tip of tongue drawn back and curled up. Now, let’s listen again and repeat.

- z and h, zh – zh
- c and h, ch – ch
- s and h, sh – sh

To some people, these three combinations may be confusing with three single-letter initials that are counterparts of j, q and x in English. Let’s compare them.

- j and z-h combination: j – j; zhi -zhi
- q and c-h combination: q – q; ch --chi
- x and s-h combination: x –x; sh –sh

Have you noticed the differences? Yes. When you pronounce the single-letter initials j, q, x, your tongue is kept close to the lower teeth; but when you pronounce the combinations zh, ch and sh (zh, ch, sh), you have your tongue curled up. Let’s listen to the three pairs together and repeat.

- single finals j, q, and x – j, q, x
- combinations z-h, c-h and sh –zh, ch, sh

There is one special rule to note about using the single initial letters j, q, x in spelling. That is, when they are spelt with another final sound, there will always be an extra letter inserted in between. This is the letter i, pronounced as yi in Pinyin. Here are a few examples.

- j plus a will be jia - jia
- q plus a will be qia -qia
- x plus a will be xia -xia

We should note that when the final letter e (counterpart of English e) follows these three initials, its pronunciation is changed and will become somewhat like the English “e” as in “yes” or “check”.

- j plus e is spelt as jie, pronounced similar to that in the English name “Jeff”: jie
q plus e is spelt as qie, pronounced similar to that in the English word “check”: qie

x plus e is spelt as xie, pronounced similar to the first part of the English word “sheer”: xie

However, in pronouncing these three pinyin sounds, you should start with the tip of the tongue more closely pressing the teeth than in English “Jeff, check and sheer”. Listen once more.

jie, qie, xie

All right! So far we have learned almost all the Pinyin sounds that can possibly pose a challenge to foreign learners. Although there are also different final letter combinations, they are nevertheless much easier to imitate because they are generally similar to the English diphthongs and triphthongs.

If you can remember all that we have learned, you can now immediately put them to use as you go on to Lesson 1. If you don’t, you’d better go through it once more.
LESSON 1

你好(NIHAO) AND 再见(ZAIJIAN):
THE MUSICAL CHINESE TONES

As we know, Chinese is by nature a tonal language, in which the meaning of any word is not only determined by its pronunciation but also by its tone. In fact, there are many homophones in Chinese --- words with same pronunciations --- and misuse of the tones may cause misunderstanding. Therefore, it is necessary to keep the right tones in spoken Chinese as you learn the pronunciation, just as if you were learning to sing.

Let’s now listen to the most common Chinese greetings. As you listen, pay attention to the ups and downs in the tones and try to repeat.

Hello Or How do you do (informal speech) 你好 ni3hao3
Hello Or How do you do (formal speech) 您好 nin2hao3

And when you leave a friend you say –

Good-bye 再见 zai4jian4

The musical pattern of 你好 and 您好 is rising up, then dipping down and rising a little again. And the pattern of the tones in 再见 is a repetition of a falling tone.

In Mandarin Chinese, there are four tones that are pitched plus one unstressed. We simply call them the first, second, third, fourth and the light tone. The four pitched tones are marked in writing with their corresponding numbers in superscript. The light tone is just like any unstressed syllable in English. It is either left unmarked or marked by a “zero” in superscript.

Of the four pitched tones, we have now learned three, the second tone in 您, the third tone in 你好 and 好, and the fourth tone in each syllable of 再见. Now let’s take two words of the remaining first tone.
1. he or she, and him or her 他/她 ta₁.
   This pronoun has two different written characters for the masculine and the feminine respectively but does not differ in pronunciation.

2. the interrogative sentence final 吗— 吗 ma¹. It is a function word used at the end of a phrase or sentence to change it into a question.

To speakers of English and other languages that are not tonal, probably the third tone is the most difficult. Let's listen to it in the first person pronoun.

I or me, 我 wo³—我 wo³

Since the Chinese word for any form of the English link verb BE is 是 (shi⁴), we simply say the following.

I am 我是 wo³ shi⁴—wo³ shi⁴
You are 你是 ni³ shi⁴—ni³ shi⁴
He is or she is 他/她是 ta¹ shi⁴—ta¹ shi⁴

Remember this third person pronoun TA (他/她) has the same pronunciation for both the masculine and the feminine although two different characters are used for the two genders.

In Chinese, sentence subjects are not always necessary. So we can reverse the word order of the above and say the following as complete sentences.

It’s me 我是 shi⁴ wo³—shi⁴ wo³
It’s you 是你 shi⁴ ni³—shi⁴ ni³
It’s he or it’s her 是他/她是 shi⁴ ta¹—shi⁴ ta¹

To make a negation, we simply say--

Not or no 不 bu⁴ -- 不 bu⁴
I’m not 我不是 wo³ bu² shi⁴
You are not 你不是 ni³ bu² shi⁴
He is not or she is not 他/她不是 ta¹ bu² shi⁴
It should be noted that in the phrase 不 is changed into the second tone, simply for the sake of natural and easy articulation. If this negation word is used independently, the original fourth-tone should be kept. So let’s listen again—

No. It’s not me 不，不是我 bu^4, bu^2 shi^4 wo^3—bu^2 shi^4 wo^3  
No. It’s not you 不，不是你 bu^4, bu^2 shi^4 ni^3—bu^2, shi^4 ni^3  
No. It’s not him or it’s not her 不，不是他/她 bu^4, bu^2 shi^4 ta^1—bu^4, bu^2 shi^4 ta^1

In fact, the function of Chinese is not exactly the same with the English link verb BE, for it does not only serve as a link between the grammatical subject and predicate of the sentence but is also a word of affirmation itself. As such, it can also mean YES, OK or RIGHT. Let’s listen to the following.

Is it or is it right? 是吗? shi^4 ma^1  
Yes. 是。shi^4  
Isn’t it or isn’t it right? 不是吗? Bu^2 shi^4 ma^1  
No. It isn’t. 不, 不是. Bu^4, bu^2 shi^4
Are you Mr. Wang? 你是王先生吗? Ni^3 shi^4 wang^2 xian^1sheng^1 ma^1  
No. I’m not him. 不，我不是他。Bu^4, wo^3 bu^2 shi^4 ta^1  
I’m not Mr. Wang. 我不是王先生。Wo^3 bu^2shi Wang^2 xian^1sheng^1  
I am; he is not. 我是，他不是。Wo^3 shi^4. Ta^1 bu^2 shi^4.  
He is; I’m not. 他是，我不是。Ta^1 shi^4, wo^3 bu^2 shi^4.  
It is me, not him. 是我，不是他。Shi^4 wo^3, bu^2 shi^4 ta^1.  
It is he, not I. 是他，不是我。Shi^4 ta^1, bu^2 shi^4 wo^3.

Ok! We know that the Chinese tones are generally fixed, one tone for each syllable—that is to say, for each single character. However, there are occasional changes because tones may influence one another in the natural flow of speech. For instance, in a word or phrase of two third tones, the first will be changed into the second tone if you speak naturally fast. Now, listen to the simple Chinese greeting again and see this for yourself. It is read twice, first separately and then as connected speech.
How do you do! 你好(hei3), 好(hao3): 你好 ni2hao3

Therefore, although the two words of the 2nd person pronouns 你 and 您 differ in tones, the difference no longer exists when they are followed by the 3rd tone word 好. Let’s listen.

Formal greeting: How do you do! 您好！nin2hao3
Casual greeting: How do you do! 你好 ni2hao3

Let’s listen to some two-character combinations that repeat the third tone. They are read twice, first separately and then in combination.

very good, very well 很 hen3, 好 hao3 --很好 hen2hao3
I think 我 wo3，想 xiang3 – 我想 wo2xiang3
you and me 你 ni3, 我 wo3 –你我 ni2wo3
you think 你 ni3, 想 xiang3你想 ni2 xiang3

In Chinese, there are many two-character words in which both characters are in the third tone but in actual use the first one is changed to the second. Let’s listen and repeat.

where or which place 哪 na3，里 li3 --哪里 na2 li3
may or can 可 ke3, 以 yi3--可以 ke2yi3

OK! Then what if more than two third tones follow one another? The answer is: it is usually the first character of the more closely related two that is changed. Let’s just listen to some examples.

I’m very well, or I’m very good 我很好 wo3 hen2 hao3
I very much want or miss, I really want or miss 我很想 wo3 hen2 xiang3
I want to write 我想写。wo3 xiang2 xie3
I miss you 我想你。wo3 xiang2 ni3
I miss you very much 我很想你 wo3 hen2 xiang2 ni3

For practice, let’s now go through all the basic tones as we learn more Chinese words. Please try to repeat without changing the tones.
The first tone
hear or listen 听 ting¹——听 ting¹
speak or say 说 shuo¹——说 shuo¹
hear people say, or it is heard 听 say ting¹ shuo¹
He or she 他/她 ta¹——他/她 ta¹
He or she hear them say, or he or she hear that…他/她听说-- ta¹
ting¹ shuo¹
Listen to him or her say, or hear him or her say 听他/她说 ting¹ ta¹
shuo¹

The second tone
you (the polite form) 您 nin²——您 nin²
come 来 lai²——来 lai²
read 读 du²——读 du²
learn 学 xue²——学 xue²
You come to read, or you please read 您来读 nin² lai² du²
You come to learn, or you please learn 您来学 nin² lai² xue²

The third tone
you 你 ni³——你 ni³
I or me 我 wo³——我 wo³
good, or well 好 hao³——好 hao³
write 写 xie³——写 xie³

Here again we should know that the tone change of the first syllable in
two connected third-tone word is natural for easy flow of speech. And so,
you don’t have to bother about this. All you need to do is speak naturally
fast with the least effort.

How do you do 你好 ni² hao³——你好 ni² hao³
You and me 你我 ni² wo³——你我 ni² wo³
You write 你写 ni² xie³——你写 ni² xie³

The fourth tone
again, or once more 再 zai⁴——再 zai⁴
see or meet 见 jian⁴——见 jian⁴
good-bye 再见 zai⁴ jian⁴
look 看 kan⁴——看 kan⁴
look again 再看 zài’kàn⁴
see, or look and see 看见 kàn⁴jiàn⁴

As we see, the single-character words 看 and 见 respectively mean “look” and “see”. And when they are used together as a two-character word, the meaning is “see”.

All right! Now we have learned the four basic tones, all we need to do is to practice them as we go on to the next lesson.
In this lesson, we will continue to consolidate our foundation in using all possible musical patterns of Chinese; we’ll learn two other things that make the Chinese language even more musical, that is, the use of word repetition and the light tone.

When the same word is repeated, there is usually some additional nuance of meaning, depending on the function of the word. For example, if a verb is repeated, the additional meaning is to keep doing it for a while or give it a try. Let’s listen and repeat.

1st tone repetition
listen for a while or give it a try 听听 ting1 ting1
speak for a while or give it a try 说说 shuo1 shuo1
listen and speak for a while 听听听说 ting1 ting shuo1 shuo1

2nd tone repetition
read for a while or give it a try 读读 du2 du2
learn for a while 学学 xue2 xue2
read and learn for a while 读读、学学 du2 du2, xue2 xue2

3rd tone repetition, with the first syllable naturally changed to the 2nd tone.
think for a while 想想 xiang2 xiang3
write for a while 写写 xie2 xie3
think and write for a while 想想写写 xiang2 xiang3 xie2 xie3

4th tone repetition
take a look 看看 kan4 kan4
go and have a look 去看看 qu4 kan4 kan4
go and have a look again 再去看看 zai4 qu4 kan4 kan4 kan4
In the above repetitions, the Chinese word for “one” – “一” (yi) could be put in the middle without changing the meaning. So you could also say——

Listen for a while or just for a try. 听一听。ting¹ yi⁴ ting¹
Read for a while or just for a try. 读一读。du² yi⁴ du²
Think for a while or just for a try. 想一想。xiang³ yi⁴ xiang³
Take a look. 看一看。kan⁴ yi² kan⁴

All right. Let’s do more practice.

You (polite form) come and learn for a short while or give it a try
您来学学 nin² lai² xue² xue²
You (polite form) read 您读 nin² du²
You (polite form) come and read or you are to read 您来读 nin² lai² du²
Goodbye, literally again see 再见 zai⁴ jian⁴
Look and see, or simply see 看见 kan⁴ jian⁴
Look again, literally again look 再看 zai⁴ kan⁴

Since tones may influence one another in connected speech or occasionally change for special emphasis, the first-tone word “一” (yi) inserted in the verb repetitions are sometimes changed according to the tone of the repeated word. But you don’t have to worry about this, because you will tend to get the right tone if you just make the least effort when speaking. So let’s listen again. And as you listen and repeat, pay attention to the tone changes of the word “一” (yi).

Listen for a while or just for a try. 听一听。ting¹ yi⁴ ting¹
Read for a while or just for a try. 读一读。du² yi⁴ du²
Think for a while or just for a try. 想一想。xiang³ yi⁴ xiang³
Take a look. 看一看。kan⁴ yi² kan⁴

Besides these action verbs, the third-tone 好 which we have learned in the greeting “你好” may be repeated as well, and the repetition means “seriously” or “well”. It actually has two different tone patterns, determined by whether it is used in formal speech or informal speech. So, let’s listen and repeat.
listen seriously and well (formal) 好好听 hao² hao³ ting¹
listen seriously and well (informal) 好好(儿)听 hao³ hao’r² ting¹
speak seriously and well (formal) 好好说 hao² hao³ shuo¹
speak seriously and well (informal) 好好(儿)说 hao³ hao²’r shuo¹
read seriously and well (formal) 好好读 hao² hao³ du²
read seriously and well (informal) 好好(儿)读 hao³ hao²’r du²

Ok! Now after learning so much of repetitions of single-character or single-syllable words, we should know that the two-character words can also be repeated. Here are a few examples.

learn or study 学习 xue² xi²
learn or study for a while 学习学习 xue² xi² xue² xi²
consider or think 考虑 kao³ lv⁴
take time to consider or think for a while 考虑考虑 kao³ lv⁴ kao³ lv⁴
take a rest 休息 xiu¹ xi
take some rest or rest for a while! 休息休息！ xiu¹ xi xiu¹ xi
take a real good rest! 好好休息休息！ hao³ hao³ xiu¹ xi xiu¹ xi

In the above words, the second character is a synonym or complementary to the first in meaning, so the whole two-character words are repeated as a whole, with the second pronounced in the light tone or the original tone, depending on whether it is formal or informal. If the relation between the two single characters is coordinating or contrasting, then each character is repeated separately and the original tones are kept unchanged. For example –

listen and read 听读 ting¹ du²
listen and read for a while 听听读读 ting¹ ting¹ du² du²
read and write 读写 du² xie³
read and write for a while 读读写写 du² du² xie² xie³
eat and drink 吃喝 chi¹ he¹
keep eating and drinking, indulge in food and comfort 吃吃喝喝
chi¹ chi¹ he¹ he¹
talk and laugh, make jokes and be merry 说笑 shuo¹ xiao⁴
enjoy talking with friends and be happy 说说笑笑 shuo¹ shuo¹
xiao⁴ xiao⁴
play and be merry 玩乐 wan² le⁴
enjoy pleasures 玩玩乐乐 wan² wan² le⁴ le⁴
good, nice or beautiful 漂亮 piao⁴ liang⁴
very pretty, nice or beautiful 漂漂亮亮 piao⁴ piao⁴ liang⁴ liang⁴
serious or seriously 认真 ren⁴ zhen¹
very seriously 认认真真 ren⁴ ren⁴ zhen¹ zhen¹

All right! From the above we see how repetitions contribute to the musicality of the Chinese language. In fact, not only verbs can be repeated, but also nouns, adjectives and adverbs. However, when words of different parts of speech are repeated, the change of meaning is also different.

*Let’s first learn repetitions of some nouns that are related with time.*

day (informal) 天 tian¹
day by day, every day (informal)天天 tian¹ tian¹
day (formal) 日 ri⁴
day by day, every day （formal）日日 ri⁴ ri⁴
night (formal) 夜 ye⁴
night by night, every night 夜夜 ye⁴ ye⁴
time, hour 时 shi²
time and again, now and then 时时 shi² shi²
a quarter of an hour 刻 ke⁴ ke⁴
every quarter of an hour 刻刻 ke⁴ ke⁴
every now and then, often, 时时刻刻 shi² shi² ke⁴ ke⁴
month 月 yue⁴
every month 月月 yue⁴ yue⁴
year 年 nian²
every year 年年 nian² nian²
each year and each month, all time 年年月月 nian² nian² yue⁴ yue⁴

*Ok! These are repetitions of time words. The following are some words related with people.*

person, man 人 ren²
each person, everybody 人人 ren² ren²
family, home or house 家 jia¹
every family, all families 家家 jia¹ jia¹
male and female 男女 nan² nv³
all males and females, all the people 男男女女 nan² nan² nv² nv³
mountain and water, the landscape 山水 shan¹ shui³
all mountains and waters 山山水水 shan¹ shan¹ shui³ shui³
street and alley 街巷 jie¹ xiang⁴
all streets and alleys, the whole town 街街巷巷 jie¹ jie¹ xiang⁴ xiang⁴

Next, let’s see some repetitions of words that can be used as adjectives and adverbs.
big, large 大 da⁴
quite big, considerably large 大大的 da⁴ da⁴ de
small, 小 xiao⁴
quite small 小小的 xiao² xiao³ de
of big and small, of various sizes 大大小小的 da⁴ da⁴ xiao² xiao³ de
long 长 chang²
quite long 长长的 chang² chang² de
short 短 duan²
quite short 短短的 duan² duan³ de
long and short, of various lengths 长短短的 chang² chang² duan² duan³ de
tall, high 高 gao¹
low, short 低 di¹
of various heights 高高低低 gao¹ gao¹ di¹ di¹
red 红 hong²
quite red, fairly red 红红的 hong² hong² de
green 绿 lv⁴
quite green, fairly green 绿绿的 lv⁴ lv⁴ de
of various colors, colorful 红红绿绿 hong² hong² lv⁴ lv⁴ de
blue 蓝 lan²
quite blue, fairly blue 蓝蓝的 lan² lan² de
yellow or brown 黄 huang²
quite yellow or brown 黄黄的 huang² huang² de
often 常 chang²
quite often, very frequently 常常 chang² chang²
fast, quick 快 kuai⁴
quite fast, fairly quick 快快 kuai⁴ kuai⁴
guite slow, taking one’s time (in doing something) 慢慢 man⁴ man⁴
now quick, now slow; at different speed 快快慢慢 kuai⁴ kuai⁴ man⁴ man⁴
clear, easy to see or understand 清楚 qing¹ chu³
very clear and easy to see or understand 清清楚楚 qing¹ qing¹ chu² chu³
clean 干净 gan¹ jing⁴
very clean 干干净净 gan¹ gan¹ jing⁴ jing⁴
orderly, in good order 整齐 zheng³ qi²
in very good order 整整齐齐 zheng² zheng³ qi² qi²

Very good! We have now learned many words as well as their repetition’s. You can practice a few times to get used to the interesting play of Chinese tones in actual use. However, we should know that not every word in Chinese can be repeated, and so it is still necessary to learn from native speakers what words actually can be.
In this lesson, we will learn more about the musicality of Mandarin language song through the use of the light tone and word repetition. The light tone is also called the neutral tone. It is easier to learn than other pitched tones simply because it is just like any unstressed syllable in English. Characters using the light tone are usually those that serve the function of word suffixes or particles that only have a complementary meaning. Let’s first take the plural suffix of personal pronouns as example.

the plural suffix of personal pronouns 们 men²

As we hear, this character is pronounced in the second tone ---that is, the rising tone. However, it is often changed into the unstressed light tone in natural speech if the plurality is not emphasized. Let’s listen.

I or me 我 wo³
we or us 我们 wo³ men²—我们 wo³ men
you (singular) 你 ni³
you (plural) 你们 ni³men²—你们 ni³ men
he or she 他/她 ta¹
they or them 他们 ta¹men²—他们 ta¹ men

When the plural meaning is especially emphasized in contrast to the singular, the original second tone of 们(men²) is kept unchanged. For example——

It’s me, not us. 是我, 不是我们 shi⁴ wo³，bu² shi⁴ wo³ men²
It’s you in singular, not you in plural. 是你, 不是你们 shi⁴ ni³，bu² shi⁴ ni³ men²
In Chinese, this suffix can also be added to a noun referring to people. Please listen and repeat.

- person or man 人 ren²
- people 人们 ren²men
- male, man 男人 nan²ren
- men 男人们 nan²renmen
- female, woman 女人 nv³ren²
- women 女人们 nv³ren²men
- friend 朋友 peng²you
- friends 朋友们 peng²youmen
- child 孩子 hai²zi
- children 孩子们 hai²zimen

As we hear, the light tone is actually not only used in the plural suffix in the above, but also in the second syllable of the two-character or two-syllable words. This often happens when the second character is only a synonym of the first or is only complementary in meaning. So let’s listen again.

- people 人们 ren²men
- male, man 男人 nan²ren
- men 男人们 nan²renmen
- female, woman 女人 nv³ren²
- women 女人们 nv³ren²men
- friend 朋友 peng²you
- friends 朋友们 peng²youmen
- child 孩子 hai²zi
- children 孩子们 hai²zimen

The single character word 子(zi) which is originally pronounced in the third tone is also changed to the light tone since it’s used as a suffix. For example ---

- son 儿子 er²zi
- grandson 孙子 sun¹zi
- wife 妻子 qi¹zi
Now let’s change them into the plural by adding the personal plural marker 们 men

sons 儿子们 er²zimen
孙子们 sun¹zimen
妻子们 qi¹zimen
children 孩子们 hai²zimen

Apart from the suffixes, the repetition of the same noun words is also changed into the light tone because the repetition adds no meaning. Let’s listen and repeat.

dad 爸爸 ba⁴ba
mom 妈妈 ma¹ma
elder sister 姐姐 jie³jie
younger sister 妹妹 mei⁴mei
elder brother 哥哥 ge¹ge
younger brother 弟弟 di⁴di
grandpa 爷爷 ye²ye
granny 奶奶 nai³nai
uncle on mother’s side 舅舅 jiu⁴jiu
younger uncle on father’s side 叔叔 shu¹shu
elder uncle on father’s side 伯伯 bo³bo
aunt on father’s side 姑姑 gu¹gu

Ok. Now let’s learn another frequently used light-tone word, the possessive marker and nominalizer.

my or mine 我的 wo³ de
my father 我的爸爸 wo³ de ba⁴ba
my wife 我的妻子 wo³ de qi¹zi
your or yours (singular) 你的 ni³ de——
your mother 你的妈妈 ni³ de ma¹ma
yours or your (plural) 你们的 ni³men² de
yours or your (plural) grandpa 你们的爷爷 ni³men² de ye²ye
his or her or hers 他/她的 ta¹ de——
his elder sister 他的姐姐 ta¹ de jie³jie
his, her or hers 他/她的 ta¹ de ——
her elder brother 他/她的哥哥 ta$^1$ de ge$^1$ge
t heir children 他们的孩子 ta$^1$men de hai$^2$zi
our or ours 我们的 wo$^3$men$^2$de
our friends 我们的朋友 wo$^3$men de peng$^2$you
the children’s 孩子们的 hai$^2$zimen de
the children’s uncle on mother’s side 孩子们的舅舅 hai$^2$zimen de
jiu$^4$jiu

Now let’s practice the musical Chinese tones with more easy phrases using 的 (de)

his father’s 他的爸爸的 ta$^1$ de ba$^4$ba de
his mother’s 他的妈妈的 ta$^1$ de ma$^1$made
my grandpa’s or of my grandpa’s 我的爷爷的 wo$^3$ de ye$^2$ye de
my elder sister’s or of my elder sister 我的姐姐的 wo$^3$ de jie$^3$ji de
my elder brother’s 我的哥哥的 wo$^3$ de ge$^1$ge de
my younger brother’s 我的弟弟的 wo$^3$ de di$^4$di de
your elder sister’s 你的姐姐的 ni$^3$ de jie$^3$jie de
your younger sister’s 你的妹妹的 ni$^3$ de mei$^4$mei de
your sister’s 你的妹妹的 ni$^3$ de jie$^3$mei$^4$ de
her boyfriend’s 她的男朋友的 ta$^1$ de nan$^2$peng$^2$you$^3$ de
his girlfriend’s 他的女朋友的 ta$^1$ de nv$^3$peng$^2$you$^3$ de
our company’s 我们的公司的 wo$^3$men$^2$ de gong$^1$s$^1$ de
your factory’s 你们的工厂的 ni$^3$men$^2$ de gong$^1$chang$^3$ de

We should also know that the possessive marker 的 (de) is not always necessary. For instance, in all the above phrases the first 的 can be omitted. So let’s have a review of them and leave out the first one.

his father’s 他爸爸的 ta$^1$ ba$^4$ba de
his mother’s 他妈妈的 ta$^1$ ma$^1$ma de
my grandpa’s or of my grandpa’s 我爷爷的 wo$^3$ ye$^2$ye de
my elder sister’s or of my elder sister 我姐姐的 wo$^3$ jie$^3$jie de
my elder brother’s 我哥哥的 wo$^3$ ge$^1$ge de
my younger brother’s 我弟弟的 wo$^3$ di$^4$di de
your elder sister’s 你姐姐的 ni$^3$ jie$^3$jie de
your younger sister’s 你妹妹的 ni$^3$ mei$^4$mei de
Your sister’s 你姐妹的  \( ni^3 \ jie^3 \ mei^4 \ de \)
Her boyfriend’s 她男朋友的  \( ta^1 \ nan^2 \ peng^2 \ you^3 \ de \)
His girlfriend’s 他女朋友的  \( ta^1 \ nv^3 \ peng^2 \ you^3 \ de \)
Our company’s 我们公司的  \( wo^3 \ men^2 \ gong^1 \ si^1 \ de \)
Your factory’s 你们工厂的  \( ni^3 \ men^2 \ gong^1 \ chang^3 \ de \)

The next thing to learn about the word 的(de) is its function as a nominalizer. This is to say, when it is used after a verb, the verb is changed into a noun phrase.

what is heard, or listened to 听的  \( ting^1 \ de \)——
what is said or spoken 说的  \( shuo^1 \ de \)——
what is being thought about 想的  \( xiang^3 \ de \)
what is read 读的  \( du^2 \ de \)——
what is learned 学的  \( xue^2 \ de \)——
what or who has come 来的  \( lai^2 \ de \)
what is written 写的  \( xie^3 \ de \)——
what is looked at 看的  \( kan^4 \ de \)
what is seen or what is met with 见的  \( jian^4 \ de \)
what is seen 看见的  \( kan^4 jian^4 \ de \)
what is done or made 做的  \( zuo^4 \ de \)

Let’s do more practice of the tones using a subject word we have learned. Listen and repeat.

what mother says or said 妈妈说的  \( ma^1 \ ma \ shuo^1 \ de \)
what grandma listens to or has heard 奶奶听的  \( nai^3 \ nai \ ting^1 \ de \)
what grandpa thinks or thought. 爷爷想的  \( ye^2 ye \ xiang^3 \ de \)
what father’s younger brother writes or wrote 叔叔写的  \( shu^1 shu \ xie^2 \ de \)
what the younger brother learns or learned 弟弟学的  \( di^4 di \ xue^2 \ de \)
what the younger sister reads or has read 妹妹读的  \( mei^4 mei \ du^2 \ de \)
what the elder brother looks at or looked at 哥哥看的  \( ge^4 ge \ kan^4 \ de \)
what the elder sister sees or has seen 姐姐见的  \( jie^3 jie \ jian^4 \ de \) or 姐姐看见的  \( jie^3 jie \ kan^4 jian^4 \ de \)
what we make or do, or what we have made or done 我们做的  \( wo^3 men^2 \ zuo^4 \ de \)
Another important use of the light tone is with the past or perfect tense marker (le). Let's listen and repeat.

said or have said 说了 shuo¹ le——
heard or have heard 听了 ting¹ le——
read or have read 读了 du² le——
learned or have learned 学了 xue² le——
came or have come 来了 lai² le——
became good or have become good, It’s OK now 好了 hao³ le——
wrote or have written 写了 xie³ le——
looked or have looked 看了 kan⁴ le——
saw or have seen; met or have met 见了 jian⁴ le——
saw or have seen 看见了 kan⁴ jian⁴ le

did, made or have done or have made 做了 zuo⁴ le——
EXTRA EXERCISE

Now after learning possible tone changes in repetitions, we will listen to some short sentences using all the tones. Please try to keep the ups and downs of the tones in each sentence as you listen.

He has listened or he listened 他听了 ta'ting¹ le
They heard or have heard 他们听了 ta'men ting¹ le
He said, or he has said 他说了 ta¹ shuo¹ le
They said or they have said 他们说了 ta'men shuo¹ le
He has come, or he came 他来了 ta¹ lai² le
They came or they have come 他们来了 ta'men lai² le
We read, or we have read 我们读了 wo³men du² le
We learned, or we have learned 我们学了 wo³men xue² le
You (polite form) have listened or, or you listened 您听了 nin² ting¹ le
You (polite form) have said, or you said 您说了 nin² shuo¹ le
You (polite form) have come 您来了 nin² lai² le
You (polite form) said or have said 您读了 nin² du² le
You (polite form) learned or have learned 您学了 nin² xue² le
I heard, listened to, or have heard or listened to 我听了 wo³ ting¹ le
I said or have said 我说了 wo³ shuo¹ le
I read or have read 我读了 wo³ du² le
I have learned 我学了 wo³ xue² le
I thought or I have thought 我想了 wo² xiang³ le
You wrote or you have written 我写了 wo² xie³ le
I looked or have looked 我看了 wo³ kan⁴ le
He looked or has taken a look 他看了 ta¹ kan⁴ le
I saw or have seen 我见了 wo³ jian⁴ le
He saw or has seen, or has met 他见了 ta¹ jian⁴ le
I looked and saw or I have looked and seen 我看见了 wo³ kan⁴ jian⁴ le

Goodbye 再见了 zai⁴ jian⁴ le
All right! One thing to note is that although there are a few words that are used to mark the tense, Chinese do not always mark the tense because it does not really have the grammar like that of English. In most cases, the tense is understood in the context or with words indicating the particular time of the action. As for the use of 了 in the last expression of the above, “再见了”, its function is simply a sentence final and not a tense marker. Another case of using it as a sentence final is to say something is done.

It’s Ok now. 好了。

Yes. After learning all this, let’s say 好了, and do more exercises on the musical tones. Listen and repeat.

He has heard what I said or has taken my advice.
--他听了我说的。Ta⁰ ting¹ le wo³ shuo¹ de
As for what I said, he has heard or taken as advice.
--我说的他听了。wo³ shuo¹ de ta¹ ting¹ le
They have heard what we said or taken our advice.
--他们听了我们说的。ta¹ men ting¹ le wo³ men shuo¹ de
As for what we said, they have heard or taken as advice.
--我们说的他们听了。wo³ men shuo¹ de ta¹ men ting¹ le
I have written down or written about what he thinks.
--我写了他想的。wo² xie³ le ta¹ xiang³ de
As for what he thinks, I have written.
--他想的我写了。ta¹ xiang³ de wo² xie³ le
We have written about or written down what they think.
--我们写了他们想的。wo³ men xie³ le ta¹ men xiang³ de
As for what they think, we have written about or written down.
--他们想的我们写了。ta¹ men xiang³ de wo³ men xie³ le
I have seen what he has looked at, or looked through.
--我见了他看的。wo³ jian⁴ le ta¹ kan⁴ de
As for what he looked at or looked through, I have seen.
--他看的我见了。ta¹ kan⁴ de wo³ jian⁴ le
We have seen what they looked at or looked through.
--我们见了他们看的。wo³ men jian⁴ le ta¹ men kan⁴ de
As for what they looked at or looked through, we have seen.
--他们看的我们见了。ta¹ men kan⁴ de wo³ men jian⁴ le
You have said what I think.
--你说了我想的。ni³ shuo¹ le wo² xiang³ de
As for what I think, you have said it.
--我想的你说了 wo² xiang³ de ni³ shuo¹ le
You have said what we think.
--你们说了我们想的。ni³men shuo¹ le wo³men xiang³ de
As for what we think, you have spoken it out.
--我们想的你们说了。wo³men xiang³ de ni³men shuo¹ le
He has read what I think.
--他读了我写的。ta¹ du² le wo² xie³ de
As for what I have written, he has read.
--我写的他读了。wo² xie³ de ta¹ du² le
They have read what we wrote.
--他们读了我们写的。ta¹men du² le wo³men xie³ de
As for what we have written, they have read.
--我们写的他们读了。wo³men xie³ de ta¹men du² le
He has written out or written about what I think.
--他写了我想的。ta¹ xie³ le wo² xiang³ de
As for what I think, he has written it out or written down.
--我想的他写了。wo² xiang³ de ta¹ xie³ le
We have read what they have written.
--我们看了他们写的。wo³men kan⁴ le ta¹men xie³ de
As for what they have written, we have read.
--他们写的我们看了。ta¹men xie³ de wo³men kan⁴ le
LESSON 4

ASKING GENERAL QUESTIONS WITH “是不 是”

We have already learned in lesson 1 the Chinese affirmative word 是 (shi) and negative word 不 (bu). Now we will find it easy to ask a general question. Listen and repeat.

Is it or isn’t it? Or simply Is it? 是不是? shi⁴ bu² shi⁴

Yes or no? Or Is it true? 是不是? shi⁴ bu² shi⁴

Is it this one? 是不是这个? shi⁴ bu² shi⁴ zhe⁴ ge⁴

Is it that one? 是不是那个? shi⁴ bu² shi⁴ na⁴ ge⁴

Is this…? 这个是不是…? zhe⁴ ge⁴ shi⁴ bu² shi⁴

Is this yours? 这个是不是你的? zhe⁴ ge⁴ shi⁴ bu² shi⁴ ni³ de

Is that…? 那个是不是…? na⁴ ge⁴ shi⁴ bu² shi⁴

Is that his? 那个是不是他的? na⁴ ge⁴ shi⁴ bu² shi⁴ ta¹ de

Are you a student? 你是不是学生? ni³ shi⁴ bu² shi⁴ xue² sheng¹

Are they students? 他们是不是学生? ta¹men shi⁴ bu² shi⁴ xue² sheng¹

Is he a teacher? 他是不是老师? ta¹ shi⁴ bu² shi⁴ lao³ shi¹

Is he your boyfriend? 他是不是你的男朋友? ta¹ shi⁴ bu² shi⁴ ni³ de nan² peng² you³

Is she your girlfriend? 她是不是你的女朋友? ta¹ shi⁴ bu² shi⁴ ni³ de nv³ peng² you³

Is that one your son? 那个是不是你的儿子? na⁴ ge⁴ shi⁴ bu² shi⁴ ni³ de er² zi

Is your son that one? 你的儿子是不是那个? ni³ de er² zi³ shi⁴ bu² shi⁴ na⁴ ge⁴

Is his daughter a student? 他的女儿是不是学生? ta¹ de nv³ er² shi⁴ bu² shi⁴ xue² sheng¹

Is that student your daughter? 那个学生是不是你女儿? na⁴ ge⁴ xue² sheng¹ shi⁴ bu² shi⁴ ni² nv³ er²

Is his girlfriend a nurse? 他的女朋友是不是护士? ta¹ de nv³ peng² you³ shi⁴ bu² shi⁴ hu⁴ shi⁴
Is the doctor this one? 医生是不是这个？yi’sheng^1 shi^4 bu^2 shi^4 zhe^4 ge^4
Is this one the doctor? 这个是不是医生？zhe^4 ge^4 shi^4 bu^2 shi^4 yi’sheng^1
Is the nurse this one? 护士是不是那个？hu’shi^4 shi^4 bu^2 shi^4 na^4 ge^4
Is that one a nurse? 那个是不是护士 na^4 ge^4 shi^4 bu^2 shi^4 hu’shi^4
Is the nurse’s husband a doctor? 护士的丈夫是不是医生？hu’shi^4 de zhang^4 fu shi^4 bu^2 shi^4 yi’sheng^1
Is the doctor’s wife a nurse? 医生的妻子是不是护士？yi’sheng^1 de qi^1 zi shi^4 bu^2 shi^4 hu’shi^4
Is that one the boss? 那个是不是老板？na^4 ge^4 shi^4 bu^2 shi^4 lao^2 ban^3
Is this one the boss’s secretary? 这是不是老板的秘书？zhe^4 shi^4 bu^2 shi^4 lao^2 ban^3 de mi^4 shu

Ok! Now we need to know that in Chinese there is another word for referring to people. This is 这位 (zhe^4 wei^4). The single-character 位 means a position or seat and 这位 would mean “this respected person” It is used as an alternative to 这个 when we want to show respect to the person referred to.

这位是不是你的老师？zhe^4 wei^4 shi^4 bu^2 shi^4 ni^3 de lao^3 shi^1
这位是不是你的妻子？zhe^4 wei^4 shi^4 bu^2 shi^4 nin^2 de qi^1 zi
那位是不是他们的经理？na^4 wei^4 shi^4 bu^2 shi^4 ta^1 men de jing^3 li^3
那位是不是你们的老板？na^4 wei^4 shi^4 bu^4 shi^4 ni^3 men^2 de lao^3 ban^3

In the above, 个 and 位 as used in 这个 or 那位 are considered as measure words in Chinese, words that are used before a noun to indicate a specific aspect of it, such as its quality, shape, means of measuring the amount or number. As we go on in this course, we will gradually learn more such words. For now, let’s keep in mind that a question can also be made simply by adding the first-tone question word 吗 at the end of the sentence, as an alternative to using the pattern 是不是. So let’s now pick out a few questions from what we learned and use this word.

Are they students? 他们是不是学生？ta^1 men shi^4 bu^2 shi^4 xue^2 sheng^1
他们是学生吗？ta^1 men shi^4 xue^2 sheng^1 ma^1
Is he a teacher? 他是不是老师？ 

他表示吗？

Is he your boyfriend? 他是不是你的男朋友？

Is she your girlfriend? 她是不是你的女朋友？

Is the doctor this one? 医生是不是这位？

Is the nurse that one? 护士是不是那个？

Is this one your wife? 这位是不是你的妻子？

Is that one their manager? 那位是不是他们的经理？

In answering such general questions, we simply repeat the verb 是 or negate it with the negative word 不.

Is this one your wife? 这位是不是你妻子？

----Yes. 是。

----No. 不是。
Is that one his son? 那个是不是他儿子? na⁴ ge⁴ shí⁴ bu² shí⁴ ta¹ er²zi?

----不是。是他女儿。bu² shí⁴. Shí⁴ ta¹ nu³er²

那位是不是医生? na⁴wèi⁴ shí⁴ bu² shí⁴ yi¹shēng¹?

----不是。他是护士。----bu²shí⁴. ta¹ shí⁴ hu⁴shí⁴

这个是不是你姐姐? zhe⁴ ge⁴ shí⁴ bu² shí⁴ ni² jie³jìe?

----不是。她是我妹妹。----bu²shí⁴. ta¹ shí⁴ wò³ mei⁴ mei

你是不是学生? ni³ shí⁴ bu² shí⁴ xuè⁴shēng¹?

----不是，我是老师。----bu²shí⁴. wò³ shí⁴ lǎo⁴ shí¹

Now we should learn that the negation word 不 can be inserted between repetition of any verbal expression to change it into a question. Listen and repeat the following.

at, in, or exist in a place 在 zài⁴
Are you in? OR Are you here? Are you there? 你在不在? nǐ³ zài⁴ bu² zài⁴

at home 在家 zài⁴ jià¹
Are you at home? 你在家不家? nǐ³ zài⁴ bu² zài⁴ jià¹

be here 在这里 zài⁴ zé¹ lì³
Is he here? 他在不在这里 ta¹ zài⁴ bu² zài⁴ zé¹ lì³

be there 在那里 zài⁴ nà⁴ lì³
Is his son there? 他的儿子在不在那里? ta¹ de er²zi zài⁴ bu² zài⁴ na⁴ lì³

知道 zhī¹ dào⁴
Do you know? 你知道不知道? nǐ³ zhī¹ dào⁴ bu⁴ zhī¹ dào⁴

However, when referring to acquaintance with a person, we usually use another word in stead of 知道.

认识 ren⁴ shì², which literally means “recognize”
你认识不认识张先生? nǐ³ ren⁴shì⁴ bu² ren⁴shì⁴ zhāng¹xian¹shèng

understand 理解 lǐ² jìe³
Does he understand? 他理解不理解? ta¹ lǐ²jìe³ bu⁴ lǐ²jìe³

There is a single-character synonym of 理解. That is

懂 dòng³
Asking General Questions With “是不 是”

Do you understand? 你懂不懂? ni² dong³ bu⁴ dong³
Do you understand what he says? 你懂他说的? ni³ dong³ bu⁴ dong³ ta¹ shuo¹ de

Apart from 理解 and 懂, there is still another synonym for “understand” or “comprehend”, 明白, which originally means “clear”

be clear 明白 ming² bai

Do you understand? 你明白不明白? ni³ ming² bai bu⁴ ming² bai

All right! Now we need to know a special verb that doesn’t use the word 不 for negation. This is 有, which means “have” or “exist”. In stead of using 不 for negation, it uses the negative word 没 (mei).

have, or exist 有, there are or there is 有 you³

literally not have, or not exist 没 you³

have or don’t have, exist or not 有没有 you³ mei² you³

Do you have brothers? 你有没有兄弟? ni² you³ mei² you³ xiong¹ di⁴

Do you have sisters? 你有没有姐妹? ni² you³ mei² you³ jie³ mei⁴

Do you have brothers and sisters? 你有没有兄弟姐妹?

Does he have a computer? 他有没有电脑? ta¹ you³ mei² you³ dian⁴ nao³

Is there any mail for me? 有没有我的邮件?
wo² you³ mei² you³ xin¹ you² jian⁴

Is there a telephone call for me? 有没有我的电话? 有没有我的电
you³ mei² you² wo³ de dian⁴ hua⁴

Is there anybody here? 这里有没有人? zhe⁴ li² you³ mei² you³ ren²

Is there a hotel there? 那里有没有宾馆? na⁴ li² you³ mei² you³ bin¹ guan³

Of course, we can also use the interrogative word 吗 to ask the general questions.

Is this fruit expensive? 这水果贵不贵? zhe⁴ shui³ guo³ gui⁴ bu² gui⁴

---- 这水果贵吗? zhe⁴ shui³ guo³ gui⁴ ma¹

Is that dress cheap? Or Is that piece of clothing cheap? 那衣服便宜不便宜?
na⁴ yi¹ fu pian² yi¹ bu² pian² yi¹

---- 那衣服便宜吗? na⁴ yi¹ fu pian² yi¹ ma¹

Is this OK? 这行不行? zhe⁴ xing² bu² xing²

---- 这行吗? zhe⁴ xing² ma¹
Do you have brothers? 你有没有兄弟？ni³ you³ mei² you³ xiong¹ di⁴
----- 你有兄弟吗？ni³ you³ xiong¹ di⁴ ma¹
Do you have sisters? 你有没有姐妹？ni² you³ mei² you³ jie³ mei⁴
-----你有姐妹吗？ni³ you³ jie³ mei⁴ ma¹
Do you have brothers and sisters? 你有没有兄弟姐妹？ni² you³
mei² you³ xiong¹ di⁴ jie³ mei⁴
-----你有兄弟姐妹吗？ni² you³ xiong¹ di⁴ jie³ mei⁴ ma¹
Does he have a computer? 他有没有电脑？ta¹ you³ mei² you³
dian⁴ nao³
-----他有电脑吗？ta¹ you³ dian⁴ nao³ ma¹
Is there any mail for me? 有没有我的邮件？you³ mei² you³ wo³ de
you² jian⁴
-----有我的邮件吗？you³ wo³ de you³ jian⁴ ma¹
Is there any new mail? 有没有新邮件？you³ mei² you³ xin¹
you² jian⁴
-----有新邮件吗？you³ xin¹ you² jian⁴ ma¹
Is there a telephone call for me? 有没有我的电话？you³ mei² you³
wo³ de dian⁴ hua⁴
-----有我的电话吗？you³ wo³ de dian⁴ hua⁴ ma¹
Is there anybody here? 这里有没有人？zhe⁴ li³ you³ mei² you³ ren²
-----这里有人吗？zhe⁴ li³ you³ ren² ma¹
Is there a hotel there? 那里有没有宾馆？na⁴ li³ you³ mei² you³
bin¹ guan³
-----那里有宾馆吗？na⁴ li³ you³ bin¹ guan³ ma¹

When有没有 is used before a verb, it makes the perfect tense, as does
its English counterpart HAVE.

Has the teacher come? 老师有没有来？lao³ shi¹ you³ mei² you³ lai²
Has the student or have the students gone there? 学生有没有去？
xue² sheng¹ you³ mei² you³ qu⁴
Has your brother said or told? 你弟弟有没有说？ni³ di⁴ di you³
mei² you³ shuo¹
Has he heard or listened? 他有没有听？ta¹ you³ mei² you³ ting¹
Have you done it? 你们有没有做？ni³ men you³ mei² you³ zuo⁴
Has his girlfriend gone there? 他的女朋友有没有去？
nv³ peng² you³ you³ mei² you³ qu⁴
Asking General Questions With “是不是”

Has the manager read this mail?  经理有没有读这个邮件？jing¹lí³
you³ mei² you³ du² zhe⁴ ge⁴ you² jian⁴
Do you have written that mail?  你有没有写那个邮件？ni³ you³ mei²
you³ xie³ na⁴ ge⁴ you² jian⁴
Have you taken your meal?  你有没有吃饭？ni³ you³ mei² you³
chi¹ fan⁴
Have you looked? Or Have you seen?  你有没有看？ni³ you³ mei²
you³ kan⁴
Have you seen? You have seen?  你有没有看见？ni³ you³ mei² you³ kan⁴ jian⁴
Has his sister seen the movie or a movie?  他妹妹有没有看电影？
ta¹ mei⁴ mei you³ mei² you³ kan⁴ dian⁴ ying³
Have you met? Or Have you met each other?  你们有没有见面？
ni³ men you³ mei² you³ jian⁴ mian⁴

However, in standard Mandarin Chinese, the word 有 itself is not used
as a perfect tense marker. What actually marks the tense is the negative
word 没. So as an alternative to 有没有 plus a verb, we can ask the same
question with this word 没 inserted in the repetition of the verb. Let’s turn
what we have just learned into this shorter form.

Has the teacher come?  老师有没有来？lao³ shi¹ you³ mei² you³ lai²
老师来没来？lao³ shi¹ lai² mei² lai²
Has the student or have the students gone there?  学生有没有去？
xue² sheng¹ you³ mei² you³ qu⁴
学生去没去？xue² sheng¹ qu⁴ mei² qu⁴
Has your brother said or told?  你弟弟有没有说？ni³ di⁴ di you³
mei² you³ shuo¹
你弟弟说没说？ni³ di⁴ di shuo¹ mei² shuo¹
Has he heard or listened?  他有没有听？ta¹ you³ mei² you³ ting¹
他听没听？ta¹ ting¹ mei² ting¹
Have you done it?  你们有没有做？ni³ men you³ mei² you³ zuo⁴
你们做没做？ni³ men zuo⁴ mei² zuo⁴
Has his girlfriend gone there?  他的女朋友有没有去？ta¹ de
nv³ peng² you³ you³ mei² you³ qu⁴
他的女朋友去没去？ta¹ de nv³ peng² you³ qu⁴ mei² qu⁴
Has the manager read this mail?  经理有没有读这个邮件？jing¹ li³
you³ mei² you³ du² zhe⁴ ge⁴ you² jian⁴
经理读没读这个邮件？jing¹ li³ du² mei² du² zhe⁴ ge⁴ you² jian⁴
Have you written that mail? 你有没有写那个邮件？ni³ you³ mei² you³ xie³ na⁴ ge⁴ you² jian⁴
Have you taken your meal? 你有没有吃饭？ni³ you³ mei² you³ chi¹ fan⁴
Have you looked 你有没有看？ni³ you³ mei² you³ kan⁴
Have you seen? 你有没有看见？ni³ you³ mei² you³ kan⁴ jian⁴
Has his sistern seen the movie or a movie? 他妹妹有没有看电影？ta¹ mei⁴ mei³ you³ mei² you³ kan⁴ dian⁴ ying³
Have you met each other? 你们有没有见面？ni³ men you³ mei² you³ jian⁴ mian⁴

One very special point to note about using 有没有 or the verb repetition with the insertion of 没 is that they are not used along with the question word 吗. When making the question with 吗, the perfect marker 了 is used. So let's now change the same questions by using these two function words.

Has the teacher come? 老师来了吗？lao³ shi¹ lai² le ma¹
Have the students Or Has the student gone? 学生去了吗？xue² sheng¹ qu⁴ le ma¹
Has your younger brother said it? 你弟弟说了吗？ni³ di⁴ di shuo¹ le ma¹
Has he heard or listened? 他听了吗？ta¹ ting¹ le ma¹
Have you done? 你们做了吗？ni³ men zuo⁴ le ma¹
Has his girlfriend gone there? 他的女朋友去了吗？ta¹ de nv³ peng³ you³ qu⁴ le ma¹
Has the manager read this mail? 经理读这个邮件了吗？jing¹ li³ du² zhe⁴ ge⁴ you² jian⁴ le ma¹
Have you written that mail? 你写那个邮件了吗？ni³ xie³ na⁴ ge² you² jian⁴ le ma¹
Have you taken your meal? 你吃饭了吗?  ni³ chi¹ fan⁴ le ma¹ Or 你吃了吗?  ni³ chi¹ le ma¹
Have you looked? 你看了吗?  ni³ kan⁴ le ma¹
Have you seen? 你看见了吗?  ni³ kan⁴ jian⁴ le ma¹
Has he seen the movie? 他看电影了吗?  ta¹ kan⁴ dian⁴ ying³ le ma¹
Have you met? 你们见面了吗?  ni³ men jian⁴ mian⁴ le ma¹

If the answer to the question is yes, you can either repeat the 是 or directly repeat the verb. You don’t have to repeat the subject because it can be omitted in Chinese.

Have come 来了。lai² le Or 是，来了。shi¹, lai² le
Have gone there 去了。qu⁴ le Or 是，去了。shi¹, qu⁴ le
Have listened 听了。ting¹ le Or 是，听了。shi¹, ting¹ le
Have made Or have done 做了。zuo⁴ le Or 是，做了。shi¹, zuo⁴ le
Have eaten Or have taken the meal 吃了。chi¹ le Or 是，吃了。shi¹, chi¹ le
Have met 见面了。jian⁴ mian⁴ le; Or 是，见面了。shi¹, jian⁴ mian⁴ le; Or 见了。jian⁴ le

If the answer is no, you have several choices. You can say 没有 Or 没, with or without repeating the verb. So the following answers are all correct.

Haven’t or hasn’t read 没有, 没, 没有读, 没读 mei² you³, mei², mei² you³ du², mei² du²
Haven’t or hasn’t written 没有, 没, 没有写, 没写 mei² you³, mei², mei² you³ xie³, mei² xie³
Haven’t or hasn’t looked 没有, 没, 没有看, 没看 mei² you³, mei², mei² you³ kan⁴, mei² kan⁴
Haven’t or hasn’t seen 没有, 没, 没有见, 没见 mei² you³, mei², mei² you³ jian⁴, mei² jian⁴

Now let’s come back to the pattern of word repetition with the negative 不 inserted in between. We should know this pattern not only applies to verb repetition but also to adjective repetition.

OK? Or Is it good? 好不好? hao³ bu⁴ hao³
Is it correct? Or Am I right? 对不对? dui\(^4\) bu\(^2\) dui\(^4\)
Is it big? 大不大? da\(^2\) bu\(^2\) da\(^2\)
Is it small? 小不小? xiao\(^3\) bu\(^4\) xiao\(^3\)
Is it tall? 高不高? gao\(^1\) bu\(^4\) gao\(^1\)
Is it low? 低不低? di\(^1\) bu\(^4\) di\(^1\)
Is it long? 长不长? chang\(^2\) bu\(^4\) chang\(^2\)
Is it short? 短不短 duan\(^3\) bu\(^4\) duan\(^3\)
Is it expensive? 贵不贵? gui\(^4\) bu\(^2\) gui\(^4\)
Is it cheap? 便宜不便宜? pian\(^2\)yi\(^4\) bu\(^4\) pian\(^2\)yi\(^4\)
Is it pretty? Is it beautiful? 漂亮不漂亮? piao\(^4\)liang\(^4\) bu\(^2\) piao\(^4\)liang\(^4\)
Is it clear? Or Are you clear? 清楚不清楚? qing\(^1\)chu\(^3\) bu\(^4\) qing\(^1\)chu\(^3\)
Are you happy? Or Are you glad? 高兴不高兴? gao\(^1\)xing\(^4\) bu\(^4\) gao\(^1\)xing\(^4\)
Is it new? 新不新? xin\(^1\) bu\(^4\) xin\(^1\)
Is it old? (when referring to objects) 旧不旧? jiu\(^4\) bu\(^2\) jiu\(^4\)
Is it old? (when referring to age) 老不老? lao\(^3\) bu\(^4\) lao\(^3\)
Is this computer a new one? 这电脑新不新? zhe\(^4\) dian\(^4\)nao\(^3\) xin\(^1\) bu\(^4\) xin\(^1\)
Is this fruit dear or expensive? 这水果贵不贵? zhe\(^4\) shui\(^3\)guo\(^3\) gui\(^4\) bu\(^2\) gui\(^4\)
Is that piece of clothes cheap? 那衣服便宜不便宜? na\(^4\) yi\(^1\)fu pian\(^2\)yi\(^4\) bu\(^4\) pian\(^2\)yi\(^4\)
To talk about speaking and learning languages, we need to know words of different languages first. So let's learn to say the Chinese words for some important languages and use them in sentences.

language 语言 yu³yan²

What language? 什么语言? shen²me yu³yan²

What language do you speak? 你说什么语言? ni³ shuo¹ shen²me yu³yan²

I speak English. 我说英语。wo³ shuo¹ ying¹yu³

mother tongue 母语 mu³yu³

Is English your mother tongue? 英语是不是你的母语? ying¹yu³ shi⁴ bu² shi⁴ ni³ de mu³yu³

No. My mother tongue is Chinese. 不是，我的母语是汉语。bu² shi⁴, wo³ de mu³yu³ shi⁴ han⁴yu³

foreign language 外语 wai⁴yu³

English is my foreign language. 英语是我的外语。ying¹yu³ shi⁴ wo³ de wai⁴yu³

first language 第一语言 di⁴yi¹ yu³yan²

second language 第二语言 di⁴er⁴ yu³yan²

Chinese is my first language. 汉语是我的第一语言。han⁴yu³ shi⁴ wo³ de di⁴yi¹ yu³yan²

English is my second language. 英语是我的第二语言。ying¹yu³ shi⁴ wo³ de di⁴er⁴ yu³yan²

What language does he speak? 他说什么语言? ta¹ shuo¹ shen²me yu³yan²

He also speaks English. 他也说英语。ta¹ ye³ shuo² ying¹yu³

Does his wife speak English too? 他妻子也说英语吗? ta¹ qi¹zi ye³ shuo² ying¹yu³ ma¹

Yes. She speaks English too. 是，她也说英语。shi⁴, ta¹ ye³ shuo¹ ying¹yu³
What other language can you speak? 你还会说什么语言？ni³ hai² hui⁴ shuo¹ shen² me yu³ yan²
I can also speak French and Spanish. 我还会说法语和西班牙语。
wo³ hai² hui⁴ shuo¹ fa³ yu³ he² xi¹ ban¹ ya² yu³
Can you speak Chinese too? 你也能说汉语吗？ni³ ye³ neng² shuo¹ huan⁴ yu³ ma¹
No. I’m learning it. 不会。我在学汉语。bu² hui⁴. wo³ zai⁴ xue² huan⁴ yu³

Here in the above, the word 会 is used as a synonym of 能. So we can use them interchangeably.

Can you speak Chinese? 你能说汉语吗？ni³ neng² shuo¹ huan⁴ yu³ ma¹
你会说汉语吗？ni³ hui⁴ shuo¹ huan⁴ yu³ ma¹

For the word 说，Chinese also has a synonym, 讲 jiang³. If 说 is more like the English “speak”, then 讲 is more like “talk”.

What language do your parents speak? 你爸爸和妈妈讲什么语言？ni³ ba⁴ ba² he² ma¹ ma jiang³ shen² me yu³ yan²
My father speaks German, and my mother Italian. 爸爸讲德语，妈妈讲意大利语。ba³ ba⁴ jiang³ de² yu³, ma¹ ma jiang³ yi⁴ da³ li⁴ yu³
I hear he speaks Portuguese, does he? 听说他讲葡萄牙语，是吗？ting¹ shuo¹ ta¹ jiang³ pu³ tao² ya² yu³, shi⁴ ma¹
Yes. He speaks portuguese, and also Spanish. 是的，他说葡萄牙语，也说西班牙语。shi¹ de, ta¹ shuo¹ pu³ tao² ya² yu³, ye³ shuo¹ xi¹ ban¹ ya² yu³

Can your boss speak Chinese? 你的老板能不能说汉语？ni³ de lao³ ban³ neng² bu⁴ neng² shuo¹ huan⁴ yu³
No. He doesn’t speak Chinese. 他不会说汉语。ta¹ bu² hui⁴ shuo¹ huan⁴ yu³
What he speaks is Korean. 他说的是韩语。ta¹ shuo¹ de shi⁴ han² yu³
What other language does he speak? 他还讲什么语言？ta¹ hai² jiang³ shen² me yu³ yan²
He also speaks Japanese. 他也讲日语。ta¹ ye³ jiang³ ri⁴ yu³
Is Japanese his mother tongue? 日语是他的母语吗？ri⁴ yu³ shi⁴ ta¹ de mu³ yu³ ma¹
No. His mother tongue is Korean. 不是，他的母语是韩语。bu² shi⁴, ta¹ de mu³ yu³ shi⁴ han² yu³
Is it Korean or Chinese? 是韩语还是汉语？shì⁴ han² yu³ hai² shì⁴ han⁴ yu³
It's not Korean. It’s Chinese. 不是韩语，是汉语。bu² shì⁴ han² yu³, shì⁴ han⁴ yu³

As we see, the word 还 is used as the English “or” when an alternative choice is mentioned.

Do you speak Chinese or Korean? 你说汉语还是韩语？ni³ shuo¹ han⁴ yu³ hai² shi⁴ han² yu³
Is his mother tongue French or German? 他的母语是法语还是德语？ta¹ de mu³ yu³ shì⁴ ta³ yu³ hai² shì⁴ de² yu³
The single-character word 还 itself means “still” or “still more”.

What else? 还有什么呢？hai² you³ shen² me ne
He also speaks German and Russian. 他还会说德语和俄语。ta¹ hai² hui⁴ shuo¹ de² yu³ he² e² yu³
What about your brother? 你兄弟呢？ni³ xiong¹ di⁴ ne
He speaks Italian and Spanish. 他说意大利语和西班牙语。ta¹ shuo¹ yi⁴ da⁴ li⁴ yu³ he² xi¹ ban¹ ya² yu³
How about Portuguese? 葡萄牙语呢？pu² tao² ya² yu³ ne²
Can he speak it? 他能讲吗？ta¹ neng² jiang³ ma¹
No. But he can read it. 不，但是他能读葡萄牙语。bu⁴ neng², dan⁴ shì⁴, ta¹ neng² du² pu² tao² ya² yu³

As we see now, the function word 呢 is used at the end of the sentence for a further question after the previous one.

What else? 还有什么呢？hai² you³ shen² me ne
Or simply

What else? Or Anything more? 还有呢？hai² you³ ne
How about you? 你呢？ni³ ne
how about your brother? 你兄弟呢？ni³ xiong¹ di⁴ ne
How about Russian? 俄语呢？e² yu³ ne
How about Portuguse? 葡萄牙语呢？pu² tao² ya² yu³ ne
The Chinese equivalent of the English “but” is 但是 dan⁴shi⁴

I can read, but I can’t speak. 我能读，但是不能说。wo³ neng² du², dan⁴shi⁴ bu⁴ neng² shuo¹

I can read English, but I can’t speak it. 能读英语，但是不能说。wo³ neng² du² ying¹yu³, dan⁴shi⁴ bu⁴ neng² shuo¹

only 只 zhi³
only a little 只有一点 zhi³ you³ yi⁴ dian³

Or
只有一点点 zhi³ you³ yi⁴ dian³ dian³
I can speak only a little. 我只能说一点。wo³ zhi³ neng² shuo¹ yi⁴ dian³

I have learned only a little. 我只学了一点点。wo³ zhi³ xue² le yi⁴ dian³ dian³
I have read only a little. 我只读了一点点。wo³ zhi³ du² le yi⁴ dian³

not much 多 bu⁴ duo¹
very little 少 hen³ shao³
I do not read English very much. 我读英语不多。wo³ du² ying¹yu³ bu⁴ duo¹

I have learned very little. 我学得很少。wo³ xue² de hen³ shao³
how much? or how many? 多少? duo¹ shao³
very little 少 hen³ shao³
not much 多 bu⁴ duo¹

In the above, the sentence “I have learned very little --我学得很少”, the word 得 sounds exactly like the possessive marker 的 but has a different grammatical function, that is, it used to add a complement to the verb. Let’s first compare the following.

What you said is very good. OR You have said something very good. 你说的话很好。ni³ shuo¹ de hua⁴ hen³ hao³

You speak very well. OR You speak very nicely. 你说得很好。ni³ shuo¹ de hen³ hao³

The English I learn is very good. 我学的英语很好。wo³ xue² de ying¹yu³ hen³ hao³
I have learned English very well. 英语我学得很好。ying³ yu¹ wo³ xue² de hen³ hao³
I can read, but I can’t speak well. 我能读，但是说得不好。wo³ neng² du², dan⁴ shi⁴ shuo¹ de bu⁴ hao³

OK! What we should remember is that the two function words with the same pronunciation also differ in writing.
Now it’s time for us to learn to talk about nationalities. Listen and repeat.

Which country? 哪国？na³ guo²
Which 哪 na³
Which one? 哪个？na³ ge⁴
Which country? 哪国？na³ guo²

Or
Which country? 哪个国家？na³ ge⁴ guo² jia¹
in short 哪国 na³ guo²
person, man, or people 人 ren²
Which country are you from? 你是哪个国家的人？ni³ shi⁴ na³ guo² ren²
Which country are you from? 你是哪个国家的？ni³ shi⁴ na³ ge⁴ guo² jia¹ de

There are two ways to answer such a question.
The first way is to use 是 shi⁴

I’m English. 我是英国人。wo³ shi⁴ ying¹ guo² ren²
I speak English. 我说英语。wo³ shuo¹ ying¹ yu³
I’m Chinese. 我是中国人。wo³ shi⁴ zhong¹ guo² ren²
I speak Chinese. 我说汉语。wo³ shuo¹ han⁴ yu³
I’m Spanish. 我是西班牙人。wo³ shi⁴ xi¹ ban¹ ya² ren²
I speak Spanish. 我说西班牙语。wo³ shuo¹ xi¹ ban¹ ya² yu³
I’m French. 我是法国人。wo³ shi⁴ fa³ guo² ren²
I speak French. 我说法语。wo³ shuo¹ fa³ yu³
I’m Portuguese. 我是葡萄牙人。wo³ shi⁴ pu² tao² ya² ren²
I speak Portuguese. 我说葡萄牙语。wo³ shuo¹ pu² tao² ya² yu³
I’m Italian. 我是意大利人。wo³ shi⁴ yi⁴ da⁴ li⁴ ren²
I speak Italian. 我说意大利语。wo³ shuo¹ yi⁴ da⁴ li⁴ yu³
He is German. 他是德国人。ta¹ shi⁴ de² guo³ ren²
He speaks German. 他说德语。ta¹ shuo¹ de² yu³
They are Russian. 他们是俄国人。ta¹ men shi⁴ e² guo² ren²
They speak Russian. 他们说俄语。ta¹ men shuo¹ e² yu³
She is Egyptian. 她是埃及人。ta¹ shi⁴ ai¹ ji² ren²
She speaks Arabic. 她说阿拉伯语。ta¹ shuo¹ a¹ la¹ bo² yu³
You are Indian. 你是印度人。ni³ shi⁴ yin⁴ du⁴ yu
You speak Hindi. 你说印度语。ni³ shuo¹ yin⁴ du⁴ yu
You (plural) are Japanese. 你们是日本人。ni³ men shi⁴ ri⁴ ben³ ren²
You speak Japanese. 你们说日语。ni³ men shuo¹ ri⁴ yu³
I’m Korean. 我是韩国人。wo² shi⁴ han² guo² ren²
I speak Korean. 我说韩语。wo³ shuo¹ han² yu³
I learn Chinese. 我学汉语。wo³ xue² han⁴ yu³

The second way is to use “come from” 来自 lai² zi⁴

I come from... 我来自... wo³ lai² zi⁴
I come from Britain. 我来自英国。wo³ lai² zi⁴ ying¹ guo²
I come from the United States. 我来自美国。wo³ lai² zi⁴ mei³ guo
I come from France. 我来自法国。wo³ lai² zi⁴ fa³ guo²

This sounds formal in Chinese. To answer the question informally, we have yet another way to say the same.

我是美国来的。wo² shi⁴ mei³ guo² lai² de
我是法国来的。wo³ shi⁴ fa³ guo² lai² de
我是意大利来的。wo² shi⁴ yi⁴ da⁴ li⁴ lai² de
我是澳大利亚来的。wo² shi⁴ ao⁴ da⁴ li⁴ ya⁴ lai² de

Now listen to the following and try to repeat,

and 和 he²

I speak English and French. 我说英语和法语。wo³ shuo¹ ying¹ yu³
he² fa³ yu³
He speaks Chinese and Korean. 他说汉语和韩语。ta¹ shuo¹ han⁴ yu³ he² han² yu³
Talking about Language: 你说什么语言？

You speak Spanish and Portuguese. 你说西班牙语和葡萄牙语。

ni³ shuo¹ xi¹ban¹ ya²yu³ he² pu²tao²ya²yu³

They speak German, Italian and Arabic. 他们说德语、意大利语和阿拉伯语。ta¹men shuo¹ de²yu³, yi¹da⁴li⁴yu³ he² a¹la¹bo²yu³

also, too 也 ye³

in addition, additionally, also 还 hai²

These two function words, 也 and 还, are adverbs with a similar meaning, and so they are usually interchangeable. The only difference is that 还 also means “in addition”, “what’s more”, or “still more”.

He can speak Chinese, and English as well. 他能讲汉语，也能说英语。

ta¹ neng² jiang³ han⁴yu³, ye³ neng² shuo¹ ying¹yu³

I speak French, and also German. 我说法语，还懂德语。

wo³ shuo¹ fa³yu³, hai² dong³ de²yu³

They speak Japanese, and Chinese too. 他们说日语，也说汉语。

ta¹men shuo¹ ri⁴yu³, ye³ shuo¹ han⁴yu³

What else? 还有什么？

hai² you³ shen²me

Nothing else. 没有了。

mei²you³ le

What other language do you speak? 你还说什么语言？

ni³ hai² shuo¹ shen²me yu³yan²

I speak Hindi too. 我还说印度语。

wo³ hai² shuo¹ yin⁴du⁴yu³

When 还 is used with the negative word 不 or 没，the meaning is “not yet”.

Can you speak Chinese now? 现在你能说汉语吗？

xian⁴zai⁴ ni³ neng² shuo¹ han⁴yu³ ma¹

I can not yet 还不能。

hai² bu⁴ neng²

还不行。

hai² bu⁴ xing²

I’m still learning. 我还在学。

wo³ hai² zai⁴ xue²

OK! Now let’s learn more words about languages.

some 有些，有的 you³xie¹, you³de

What language do they speak? 他们说什么语言？

ta¹men shuo¹ shen²me yu³yan²
Some people speak English. 有些人说英语。you³xie¹ ren² shuo¹ ying¹yu³
Some people speak Indian. 有些人说印度语。you³xie¹ ren² shuo¹ yin⁴du⁴yu³
Some people speak Arabic. 有些人说阿拉伯语。you³xie¹ ren² shuo¹ a¹la¹bo²yu³

As with English, we can drop the word 人 for “people” and say---

Some speak English. 有些说英语。you³xie¹ shuo¹ ying¹yu³
Some speak Hindi. 有些说印度语。you³xie¹ shuo¹ yin⁴du⁴yu³
Some speak Arabic. 有些说阿拉伯语。you³xie¹ shuo¹ a¹la¹bo²yu³

Or we can also simply say ---

有人说法语。you³ ren² shuo¹ fa³yu³
有人说德语。you³ ren² shuo¹ de²yu³
有人说俄语。you³ ren² shuo¹ e²yu³

Another synonym of 有些 and 有的 is 一些

Some people speak Spanish. 一些人讲西班牙语。yi⁴xie¹ ren² jiang³ xi¹ban¹ya²yu³
Some people speak French. 一些人讲意大利语。yi⁴xie¹ ren² jiang³ yi⁴da⁴li⁴yu³
Still some people speak Portuguese. 还有一些人讲葡萄牙语。hai² you³ yi⁴xie² ren² jiang³ pu²tao²ya²yu³
I know some French and Japanese. 我懂一些法语和日语。wo³ dong³ yi⁴xie¹ fa³yu³ he² ri⁴yu³

Now let’s go on with more useful words. Listen and repeat.

all, totally 都
totally understand, understand all 都懂 dou¹ dong³
totally understand, understand all 都理解 dou¹ li³jie³
I understand everything you say. 你说的我都懂。ni³ shuo¹ de wo³ dou¹ dong³
I don’t understand all they say. 他们说的我不是都懂。ta¹men shuo¹ de wo³ bu² shi⁴ dou¹ dong³
words and sentences, or speech 话 hua⁴
I understand all that you say. 你的话我都理解。ni³ de hua⁴ wo³ dou¹ li³ jie³

Do you understand everything? 你都懂吗？ni³ dou¹ dong³ ma¹
I understand some of it, but not all. 我懂一些，不是都懂。wo³ dong³ yi⁴ xie¹, bu² shi⁴ dou¹ dong³

We all speak English. 我们都学英语。wo³ men dou¹ shuo¹ ying⁴ yu³
We all learn Chinese. 我们都学汉语。wo³ men dou¹ xue² han⁴ yu³

He and his wife are both American. 他和他妻子都是美国人。ta¹ he² ta¹ qi¹ zi dou¹ shi⁴ mei³ guo² ren²
His grandpa and grandma are both Chinese. 他爷爷和奶奶都是中国人。ta¹ ye² ye² naí³ nai dou¹ shi⁴ zhong⁴ guo² ren²
All right! Now we have already learned quite a few words and expressions about learning and speaking a language. If you are not sure you can remember everything and put them to use, just listen and repeat once more.
As we try to use the new language we are learning, probably the most frequently used words and expressions are as follows.

I don’t understand. 我不懂。wo³ bu⁴ dong³
I don’t understand as I listen. 我听不懂。wo³ ting¹ bu⁴ dong³
I don’t understand what you say. 我听不懂你的话。wo³ ting¹ bu⁴ dong³ ni³ de hua⁴

What meaning? 什么意思？shen² me yi⁴ si
What’s the meaning? 是什么意思？shi⁴ shen² me yi⁴ si
What’s the meaning of that? 那是什么意思？na⁴ shi⁴ shen² me yi⁴ si
What’s the meaning of this? 这是什么意思？zhe⁴ shi⁴ shen² me yi⁴ si

What do you mean? 你说的是什么意思？ni³ shuo¹ de shi⁴ shen² me yi⁴ si
I don’t understand what you mean. 我不懂你的意思。wo³ bu⁴ dong³ ni³ de yi⁴ si

As we see, there is a difference between the Chinese and English sentences. That is, in Chinese, the sentence subject can be omitted if it is known from the context.

I don’t understand. 懂。bu⁴ dong³
What’s the meaning? 什么意思？shen² me yi⁴ si

Or
是什么意思？shi⁴ shen² me yi⁴ si

Of course, you may say sorry and ask for a repetition.

Sorry!
Or
Pardon! 对不起！duī bu qì
Can you say it once more? 能不能再說一遍？nèng bu nèng zài shuō yī biàn

Or you may simply use the Chinese word for “repeat”

Sorry. Can you repeat it? 对不起，能不能重複一下？duī bu qì, nèng bu chóng fù yī xià

The Chinese “一遍” and “一下” both mean “once”. And there is another word that also means the same---

once, one time 一次 yī cì
Say it once again. 再說一次。zài shuō yī cì

Then, you may need to ask about a word or phrase.

What does this word mean? 这个词是什么意思？zhé cì shí me yì si
What does this character mean? 这个字是什么意思？zhé zi shí me yì si

Please note that the word 词 for “word” is in the second tone while the word 次 for “time” or “times” is in the fourth tone.

once, one time 一次 yī cì
one word 一个词 yī cì
a word at a time 一次一个词 yī cì yī cì
How... 怎么...zěn me
How do you say...？...... 怎么说？zěn me shuō
How do you say this? 这怎么说？zhé zěn me shuō
in Chinese 在汉语里 zài hàn yǔ lǐ
use Chinese 用汉语 yòng hàn yǔ
In Chinese, how do you say it? 在汉语里怎么说？zài hàn yǔ lǐ zěn me shuō

in, inside, or within 在...里 zài...lǐ
in Chinese 在汉语里 zài hàn yǔ lǐ
How do you say this in Chinese? 这个在汉语里怎么说？zhe4 ge4 zai4 han4 yu3 li3 zen3 me shuo1
How do you say that in English? 这个在英语里怎么说？zhe4 ge4 zai4 ying1 yu3 li3 zen3 me shuo1
To use Chinese, how do you say it? 用汉语怎么说？yong4 han4 yu3 zen3 me shuo1

To make it short and compact, we can simply say

How do you say it in Chinese? 汉语怎么说？han4 yu3 zen3 me shuo1
How do you say it in English? 英语怎么说？ying1 yu3 zen3 me shuo1
How do you say “repeat” in Chinese? 重复 chong2fu4
Repeat once. 重复一遍。chong2fu4 yi2 bian4
Please repeat once. 请重复一遍。qing3 zai4 chong2fu4 yi2 bian4

Or
请重复一次。qing3 chong2fu4 yi2 ci4

So we know that in Chinese we may often omit something to make the sentence simple. Therefore, the same meaning can be expressed in sentences of different lengths.

How do you say it in Chinese?
汉语怎么说？han4 yu3 zen3 me shuo1
汉语里怎么说？han4 yu3 li3 zen3 me shuo1
在汉语里怎么说？zai4 han4 yu3 li3 zen3 me shuo1
How do you say “repeat” in Chinese? 在汉语里“repeat”怎么说？
重复 chong2fu4
How do you say “again” in Chinese? 汉语里“again”怎么说？
再 zai4
How do you say “once” in Chinese? 汉语“once”怎么说？

There are three ways to say this.

一遍 yi2 bian4
一次 yi2 ci4
一下 yi2 xia4
OK! Let's go on to more words and expressions.

Tell me. 告诉我。gao⁴su⁴ wo³
Can you tell me? 能不能告诉我? neng² bu⁴ neng² gao⁴su⁴ wo³
Can you tell me the meaning? 能告诉我意思吗? neng² gao⁴su⁴ wo³
yì³si ma¹
What does it mean? Or literally what meaning? 什么意思?

So we know that in Chinese there is something omitted in 什么意思.
The full expression should be –

这是什么意思? zhe⁴ shi⁴ shen²me yì⁴si

Or

那是什么意思? na⁴ shi⁴ shen²me yì⁴si

Or

你说的是什么意思? ni³ shuo¹ de shi⁴ shen²me yì⁴si

We can see that although in Chinese there is a translation equivalent of the English pronoun IT, it is not so frequently used as in English because its pronunciation is exactly the same with the other two pronouns for HE and SHE. It is actually often omitted or replaced by THIS 这 or THAT 那.

What does this mean? 这什么意思? zhe² shi⁴ shen²me yì⁴si
What does this character mean? 这个字是什么意思? zhe² ge⁴ zi⁴
shi⁴ shen²me yì⁴si
What does that mean? 那是什么意思? na⁴ shi⁴ shen²me yì⁴si
What does that word mean? 那个词是什么意思? na⁴ ge⁴ ci² shi⁴
shen²me yì⁴si
What do you mean? 你说的是什么意思? ni³ shuo¹ de shi⁴ shen²me yì⁴si

If you say 他/她是什么意思? it can be understood either as “What does he mean?” or “What does she mean?” because in Chinese the gender of the word differs only in writing but not in pronunciation.
Can you tell me? 能告诉我吗？neng² gao⁴ su¹ wo³ ma¹
Can you tell me what it means? 能告诉我是什么意思吗？neng² gao⁴ su¹ wo³ shi⁴ shen² me yi⁴ si ma¹
How do you translate it? 怎么翻译？zen³ me fan¹ yi⁴
Can you tell me how to translate? 能告诉我怎么翻译吗？neng² gao⁴ su¹ wo³ zen³ me fan¹ yi⁴ ma¹
How do you translate it into English? 怎么翻译成英语？zen² me fan¹ yi⁴ cheng² ying¹ yu³
Or
英语怎么翻译？ying¹ yu³ zen³ me fan¹ yi⁴
Or
What’s the English translation? 英语翻译是什么？ying¹ yu³ fan¹ yi⁴ shi⁴ shen² me
How do you translate it into Chinese? 怎么翻译成汉语？zen³ me fan¹ yi⁴ cheng² han⁴ yu³
Or
How is the Chinese translated? Or What is the Chinese translation? 汉语怎么翻译？han⁴ yu³ zen³ me fan¹ yi¹
Of course we can also say the following.

How do you say it in Chinese? 用汉语怎么说？yong⁴ han⁴ yu³ zen³ me shuo¹
用汉语怎么说？yong³ han⁴ yu³ zen³ me jiang³
用汉语怎么说？yong⁴ han⁴ yu³ zen³ me shuo¹
汉语怎么讲？han⁴ yu³ zen³ me jiang³
汉语怎么说？han⁴ yu³ zen³ me shuo¹

If you don’t remember something you have learned, you may say--

Sorry! I have forgot it. 对不起，我忘了。dui⁴ bu⁴ qi³, wo³ wang⁴ le

Here the single-character word 忘 is the short form of the two-character word 忘记. So you can also say --

I have forgot it. 我忘记了。wo³ wang⁴ ji¹ le
I have forgot this word. 我忘记了这个词。wo³ wang⁴ ji¹ le zhe⁴ ge⁴ ci²
I have forgot the meaning of this word. 我忘记了这个词的意思。
wo³ wang⁴ ji¹ le zhe⁴ ge⁴ ci² de yi⁴ si
I can’t think of it now. 想不起来了。xiang³ bu⁴ qi³ lai² le
Ah! I have called it back to mind. 啊！想起来了。A! xiang³ qi³ lai² le
Now I have called it back to mind. 现在想起来了。xian⁴ zai¹ xiang³ qi³ lai² le
Now I have kept it in mind. 现在记住了！xian⁴ zai¹ ji¹ zhu⁴ le
Now I know it or I understand it. 现在知道了。xian⁴ zai¹ zhi¹ dao⁴ le

As we see, the present perfect marker 了 may not always be related to the perfect tense. It is also a final particle that is understood according to the situation, such as “now”, “for now”, “ok”. For instance –

I understand now. 我懂了。wo³ dong³ le
I don’t understand now. 我不懂了。wo³ bu⁴ dong³ le
Sorry! Or I have to say sorry now. 对不起了。dui¹ bu⁴ qi³ le
I don’t know more about this. 不知道了。bu⁴ zhi¹ dao⁴ le
All right. 好了。hao³ le
Right. 对了。dui⁴ le
I know now. 知道了。zhi¹ dao⁴ le
I’m clear about it now. 明白了。ming² bai² le
Or
清楚了。qing¹ chu³ le

In many cases, the function word 了 may carry no meaning other than suggesting that it is the end of the sentence or that some final conclusion is reached.

All right. Or I’m ready. 好了。hao³ le
Right. 对了。dui⁴ le
Goodbye! 再见了！zai⁴ jian⁴ le

Now, let’s see more uses of this sentence final as we come to learn more useful words and expressions.

Too fast! 太快了！tai⁴ kuai⁴ le
Too slow! 太慢了！tai⁴ man⁴ le
It’s too hard! OR It’s too difficult! 太难了！tai⁴ nan² le
It’s too easy! 太容易了！tai⁴ rong²yi⁴ le
It’s too simple! 太简单了！tai⁴ jian³dan¹ le
It’s too much! 太多了！tai⁴ duo¹ le
It’s too little! 太少了！tai⁴ shao³ le
You speak too fast! 你说得太快了！ni³ shuo¹ de tai⁴ kuai⁴ le
You read too slowly! 你读得太慢了！ni³ du² de tai⁴ man⁴ le
Chinese is too difficult! 汉语太难了！han⁴yu³ tai⁴ nan² le
This is too easy! 这个太容易了！zhe⁴ ge tai⁴ rong²yi⁴ le
That is too simple! 那个太简单了！na⁴ge⁴ tai⁴ jian³dan¹ le
You know too much! 你知道得太多了！ni³ zhi¹dao⁴ de tai⁴ duo¹ le
I have learned too little! 我学得太少了！wo³ xue² de tai⁴ shao³ le

As we learned in the previous lesson, the function word 得 is used after
the verb to add to it a complement, and so it’s different from the possessive
marker 的 that is used for nouns and noun phrases. These two function
words are written differently although they have the same pronunciation.

Of course we can also replace the word 太 with other words, such as
the negative 不, or the degree adverb 很.

You speak very fast. 你说得很快。ni³ shuo¹ de hen³ kuai⁴
You read very slowly. 你读得很慢。ni³ du² de hen³ man⁴
Chinese is not difficult. 汉语不难。han⁴yu³ bu⁴ nan²
This is not easy. 这个不容易。zhe⁴ ge⁴ hen³ rong²yi⁴
That is very simple. 那个很简单。na⁴ge⁴ hen³ jian³dan¹
You know very much. 你知道得很多。ni³ zhi¹dao⁴ de hen³ duo¹
I don’t know much. 我知道得不多。wo³ zhi¹dao⁴ de bu⁴ duo¹
I have learned very little. 我学得很少。wo³ xue² de hen³ shao³

OK! Now let’s do some practice. Listen and repeat.

What? 什么? shen²me
What do you say? 你说什么? ni³ shuo¹ shen²me
What do you mean? 你说的是什么意思? ni³ shuo¹ de shi⁴ shen²me
yi⁴si
Sorry! OR Pardon! 对不起！dui⁴ bu⁴ qi³
I don’t understand what you’re saying. 我不懂你说什么。wo³ bu⁴ dong³ ni³ shuo¹ shen² me
Please repeat. 请再说一遍。qing³ zai⁴ shuo¹ yi² bian⁴
Can you/ Could you say it once more? 能不能再地说一遍? neng² bu⁴ neng² zai⁴ shuo¹ yi² bian⁴
Sorry! I still don’t understand. 对不起,我还不懂。dui⁴ bu⁴ qi³, wo³ hai² shi⁴ bu⁴ dong³
Still I still don’t understand. 我还是不懂。wo³ hai² shi⁴ bu⁴ dong³
You speak too fast. 你说得太快了。ni³ shuo¹ de tai⁴ kuai⁴ le
Can you speak a little slowly? 能不能说得慢一点? neng² bu⁴ neng² shuo¹ man⁴ yi⁴ dian³
words 单词 dan¹ ci²
I don’t know many words. 我知道的单词不多。wo³ zhi¹ dao⁴ de
grammar 语法 yu³ fa³
I know very little grammar. 我知道的语法很少。wo³ zhi¹ dao⁴ de
Chinese grammar is very difficult. 中文语法很难。zhong¹ wen²
Chinese characters are too difficult. 汉字太难了。han⁴ zi⁴ tai⁴ nan² le
sentence 句子 ju⁴ zi
I understand only short sentences. 我只懂短句子。wo³ zhi³ dong³ duan³ ju⁴ zi
I don’t understand long sentences. 我不懂长句子。wo³ bu⁴ dong³ chang² ju⁴ zi
Your sentence is too long. 你说的句子太长了。ni³ shuo¹ de ju⁴ zi tai⁴ chang² le
Can you make it shorter? 能不能再短一点? neng² bu⁴ neng² shuo¹ duan³ yi⁴ dian³
I have learned only a little. 我只学了一点。wo³ zhi³ xue² le yi⁴ dian³
Not much. OR Not many. 不多。bu⁴ duo¹
Is my tone right? 我的声调对吗? wo³ de sheng¹ diao⁴ dui⁴ ma¹
No. It’s not right. 不，不对。bu⁴, bu² dui⁴
Your tone is wrong. 你的声调不对。ni³ de sheng¹ diao⁴ bu² dui⁴
Learning and Speaking a Language: 学说语言

I remember too few words. 我记的单词太少了。wo³ ji⁴ de dan¹ ci² tai⁴ shao³ le

Your sentence is too long. 你说的句子太长了。ni³ shuo¹ de ju⁴ zi tai⁴ chang² le

It’s wrong. 错了。cuo⁴ le

All right! 好了。hao³ le

Chinese grammar is too difficult. 汉语语法太难了。han⁴ yu³ yu³ fa³ tai⁴ nan² le

Can we speak English? 我们能不能说英语? wo³ men neng² bu⁴ neng² shuo¹ ying¹ yu³
LESSON 7

WE ARE LEARNING CHINESE:
我们在学习

Although Chinese does not have the same tense changes as in English because it is not a language with inflection, there are nevertheless a few words that serve as tense markers. A tense marker may not only be placed at the end of a verb as the light-tone 了 as we have learned, but may also appear BEFORE the verb. One particular case of this is the continuous tense marker 在. This 在 is pronounced in the same fourth tone as the first word of 再见 for Goodbye but is completely a different word. Let’s listen and repeat.

be learning 在学 zai⁴ xue²

Or
be studying, or be learning 在学 zai⁴ xue² xi²
We are studying, or learning Chinese. 我们在学中文。 wo³ men zai⁴ xue² zhong¹ wen²

Or
我们在学汉语。 wo³ men zai⁴ xue² han⁴ yu³
be listening 在听 zai⁴ ting¹
I’m listening. 我在听。 wo³ zai⁴ ting¹
I’m listening to music. 我在听音乐。 wo³ zai⁴ ting¹ yin¹ yue⁴
I’m listening to you talking. 我在听你说。 wo³ zai⁴ ting¹ ni³ shuo¹
be speaking 在说 zai⁴ shuo¹
I’m speaking English. 我在说英语。 wo³ zai⁴ shuo¹ ying¹ yu³
be reading 在读 zai⁴ du²
He is reading Chinese. 他在读中文。 ta¹ zai⁴ du² zhong¹ wen²

Or
He is reading a Chinese book. 他在读中文书。 ta¹ zai⁴ du² zhong¹ wen² shu¹
be writing 在写 zai₄ xie³
I’m writing an e-mail or the e-mail. wo³ zai₄ xie³
you² jian⁴

be thinking 在想 zai₄ xiang³
I’m thinking about this problem or this question. wo³ zai₄ xiang³ zhe⁴ ge⁴ wen⁴ ti²

I’m answering this question. 我在回答这个问题。wo³ zai₄ hui² da² zhe⁴ ge⁴ wen⁴ ti²

be looking 在看 zai₄ kan⁴
The children are seeing the movie. 孩子们在看电影。hai² zimen zai₄ kan⁴ dian⁴ ying³

be doing, or be making 在做 zai₄ zuo⁴
What are you doing? 你在做什么? ni³ zai₄ zuo⁴ shen² me
I’m working. 我在工作。wo³ zai₄ gong¹ zuo⁴
I’m resting. 我在休息。wo³ zai₄ xiu¹ xi
I’m shopping. 我在购物。wo³ zai₄ gou⁴ wu⁴
I’m in bed to sleep. 我在睡觉。wo³ zai₄ shui⁴ jiao⁴
I’m eating. 我在吃饭。wo³ zai₄ chi¹ fan⁴
breakfast 早饭 zao³ fan⁴
I’m eating my breakfast. 我在吃早饭。wo³ zai₄ chi¹ zao³ fan⁴
lunch 午饭 wu³ fan⁴
I’m eating my lunch. 我在吃午饭。wo³ zai₄ chi¹ wu³ fan⁴
dinner 晚饭 wan³ fan⁴
I’m eating my dinner. 我在吃晚饭。wo³ zai₄ chi¹ wan³ fan⁴

Now we should know that the word for “do” -- 做 can be replaced by its synonym 干, which is more informal in style and more general in meaning.

What is he doing? 他在干什么? ta¹ zai₄ gan⁴ shen² me
What are they doing? 他们在干什么? ta¹ men zai₄ gan⁴ shen² me
Are they working? 他们在工作吗? ta¹ men zai₄ gong¹ zuo⁴ ma¹

Or
他们在不在工作？ta¹ men zai₄ bu² zai₄ gong¹ zuo⁴
Yes. They are working. 是的，他们在工作。shi⁴ de, ta¹ men zai₄ gong¹ zuo⁴
No. They are shopping. 不是的，他们在购物。bu² shi⁴ de, ta¹ men zai₄ gou⁴ wu⁴
No. They are watching TV. 不，他们在看电视。bu⁴, ta¹men zai⁴ kan⁴ dian⁴ shi⁴
They are seeing the movie. 他们在看电影。ta¹men zai⁴ kan⁴ dian⁴ ying³

For a synonym of 工作, the Chinese has 干活儿, which is more informal and colloquial.

Yes. They are working. 是的，他们在干活儿。shi⁴ de, ta¹men zai⁴ gan⁴ huo’r²
What work are they doing? (formal) 他们在做什么工作？ta¹men zai⁴ zuo⁴ shen²me gong¹ zuo⁴
What job are they doing? (informal) 他们在干什么活儿？ta¹men zai⁴ gan⁴ shen²me huo’r²

In fact, Chinese also has a very colloquial word for the interrogative word “what”.

What? 嘿？sha²
What do you do? 你干啥？ni³ gan⁴ sha²
What are you doing? 你在干啥？ni³ zai⁴ gan⁴ sha²
What do you say? 你说啥？ni³ shuo¹ sha²
What are you saying? 你在说啥？ni³ zai⁴ shuo¹ sha²
What is this? 这是啥？zhe⁴ sha²
What is the meaning? 这个词是啥意思？sha² yi⁴ si
What does this mean? 这个词是啥意思？sha² yi⁴ si
What do you mean? 你说的这个词是啥意思？ni³ shuo¹ de sha² yi⁴ si

I’m doing my work. 我在干活儿。wo³ zai⁴ gan⁴ huo’r²
I’m resting. 我在休息。wo³ zai⁴ xiu¹ xi
I’m in bed to sleep. 我在睡觉。wo³ zai⁴ shui⁴ jiao⁴
I’m eating. 我在吃饭。wo³ zai⁴ chi¹ fan⁴
I’m working. 我在工作。wo³ zai⁴ gong¹ zuo⁴
I’m shopping. 我在购物。wo³ zai⁴ gou⁴ wu⁴
The continuous tense marker 在 can also be replaced by a two-character word 正在, in which the first single-character 正 means “just” or “right”.

I’m eating my breakfast. 我们正在吃早饭。wo³men zheng⁴zai⁴ chi¹ zao³fan⁴
They are eating their lunch. 他们正在吃午饭。ta¹men zheng⁴zai⁴ chi¹ wu³fan⁴
You are eating your dinner. 你们正在吃晚饭。ni³men zheng⁴zai⁴ chi¹ wan³fan⁴

Of course we can also use the time adverbial for “now” along with the present tense, which has a character pronounced exactly the same with the tense marker 在.

now 现在 xian⁴zai⁴

We should know that time words are always placed before the verb or the sentence, never at the end of the sentence as in English.

What are you doing now?
你现在正在干什么？ ni³ xian⁴zai⁴ zheng⁴zai⁴ gan⁴ shen²me
I’m resting now.
我现在正在休息。wo³ xian⁴zai⁴ zheng⁴zai⁴ xiu¹xi
He is sleeping now.
他现在正在睡觉。ta¹ xian⁴zai⁴ zheng³ zai⁴ shui⁴jiao⁴
You are speaking now.
你现在正在说话。ni³ xian⁴zai⁴ zheng⁴zai⁴ shuo¹hua⁴

When other adverbs are used, they are usually placed immediately before the 在 or 正在. Let’s take three adverbs for practice.
also, too 也 ye³
I am also resting. 我也在休息。wo³ ye³ zai⁴ xiu¹ xi
They are learning Chinese, too. 他们也正在学汉语。ta¹ men ye³ zheng⁴ zai⁴ xue² han⁴ yu³

still, yet 还 hai²
I'm still working. 我还在工作。wo³ hai⁴ zai⁴ gong¹ zuo⁴
He is still looking for a job. 他还在找工作。ta¹ hai⁴ zai⁴ zhao³ gong¹ zuo⁴

all or both 都 dou¹
We are all working. 我们都在工作。wo³ men dou¹ zai⁴ gong¹ zuo⁴
Both he and she are looking for a job. 他和她都在找工作。ta¹ he² ta¹ dou¹ zai⁴ zhao³ gong¹ zuo⁴
he and she 他和她 ta¹ he² ta¹
Both he and she are looking for a job. 他和她都在找工作。ta¹ he² ta¹ dou¹ zai⁴ zhao³ gong¹ zuo⁴
They are looking for a job, and also studying. 他们在找工作，也在学习。ta¹ men zai⁴ zhao³ gong¹ zuo⁴, ye³ zai⁴ xue² xi²

As we see, the connector 和 in Chinese are used only between nominal words, while 也 and 还 are used between verbs.

I'm learning, and teaching too. 我在学习，也在教学。wo³ zai⁴ xue² xi², ye³ zai⁴ jiao⁴ xue²

Or
我在学习，还在教学。

Now, we should know that the word 在 is different from 正在 in that it is not only a continuous tense marker but also a preposition used before a word giving the place or location of the action. It is originally a verb that means “exist, lie, stay or be present”, but when functioning as a preposition, it is like the English “at”, “in” or “on”. Now let’s listen and learn.
I’m here, I’m in, I’m online, and so on. 我在 wo³ zai⁴
I’m here, or in here. 我在这里 wo³ zai⁴ zhe⁴ li³
there or in there 在那里 zai⁴ na³ li³
where or in which place? 在哪里 zai⁴ na³ li³
Where are you? 你在哪里 ni³ zai⁴ na³ li³
I’m at home 我家 wo³ zai⁴ jia¹

Or
我在家里 zai⁴ jia¹ li³
on line 在线 zai⁴ xian⁴
on the internet 在网上 zai⁴ wang² shang⁴
at the post office 在邮局 zai⁴ you² ju²
at the bank 在银行 zai⁴ yin² hang²
at the hotel 在宾馆 zai⁴ yin² hang²
at the shop or store 在商店 zai⁴ shang¹ dian⁴
at the airport 在机场 zai⁴ ji¹ chang³
at the railway station 在火车站 zai⁴ huo³ che¹ zhan⁴
at the bus stop 在汽车站 zai⁴ qi¹ che¹ zhan⁴
on the way, on the road 在路上 zai⁴ lu⁴ shang⁴
in the school 在学校 zai⁴ xue² xiao⁴
in the company 在公司 zai⁴ gong¹ si¹
in the library 在图书馆 zai⁴ tu² shu¹ guan³
in the dorm 在宿舍 zai⁴ su⁴ she⁴

It should be noted that prepositional phrases are usually used before
the verb in sentences, and sometimes the tense should be understood
according to the context.

Where do you work or are you working? 你在哪里工作? ni³ zai⁴
na³ li³ gong¹ zuo⁴
I work or I’m working in the bank. 我在银行工作。wo³ zai⁴
yin² hang² gong¹ zuo⁴
Where do take a rest or are you resting? 你在哪里休息? ni³ zai⁴
na³ li³ xiu¹ xi
I rest at home or I’m resting at home. 我在家里休息。wo³ zai⁴
jia¹ li³ xiu¹ xi
Where do you chat or are you chatting? 你们在哪里聊天? ni³ men
zai⁴ na³ li³ liao² tian¹
We chat or we’re chatting on the net. 我们在网上聊天。 wo³men zai⁴ wang³shang⁴ liao²tian¹
Where are we going to wait for him? 我们在哪里等他? wo³men zai⁴ na³ li⁴ deng³ ta¹
We will wait for him at the airport. 我们在机场等他。 wo³men zai⁴ ji¹chang³ deng³ ta¹
Are you on line chatting? 你在线聊天吗? ni³ zai⁴xian⁴ liao²tian¹ ma¹
Yes. I’m chatting on line. 是的, 我在线聊天。 shì⁴ de, wo³ zai⁴ zai⁴ xian⁴ liao²tian¹

Let’s do more practice.

I’m driving. 我在开车 wo³ zai⁴ kai¹che¹
I’m on the road, or I’m on my way. 我在路上 wo³ zai⁴ lu¹shang
I’m driving on the road. 我在路上开车 wo³ zai⁴ lu¹shang kai¹che
He is at home. 他在家里 ta¹ zai⁴ jia¹li³
He is writing characters. 他在写字 ta¹ zai⁴ xie³zi⁴
He writes, or is writing characters at home. 他在家里写字。 ta¹ zai⁴ jia¹li³ xie³zi⁴
My younger brother is in the school. 我弟弟在学校 wo³ di⁴di zai⁴ xue²xiao⁴
My younger brother is studying in the school. 我弟弟在学校学习 wo³ di⁴di zai⁴ xue²xiao⁴ xue²xi²
I learn or I’m learning Chinese in the school. 我在学校学汉语。 wo³ zai⁴ xue²xiao⁴ xue² han⁴yu³

Now let’s change the simple present tense into continuos tense.

He listens. 他听。 ta¹ ting¹
He is listening. 他在听。 ta¹ zai⁴ ting¹
She speaks 她说。 ta¹ shuo¹
She is speaking. 她在说。 ta¹ zai⁴ shuo¹ (in which the gender of the subject is different only in writing)
They read. 他们读。 ta¹men du²
They are reading. 他们在读。 ta¹men zai⁴ du²
You (in singular) learn, or you study. 你学 ni³ xue²
You (in singular) are learning. 你在学 ni³ zai⁴ xue²
You (plural) learn, or you study. 你们学 ni³ men xue²
You (plural) are learning 你们在学 ni³ men zai⁴ xue²
You (in plural) write. 你们写。ni³ men xie³
You (in plural) are writing. 你们在写。ni³ men zai⁴ xie³
I think. 我想。wo³ xiang³
I’m thinking. 我在想。wo³ zai⁴ xiang³
We are thinking. 我们在想。wo³ men zai⁴ xiang³
I look. 我看。wo³ kan⁴
I’m looking. 我在看。wo³ zai⁴ kan⁴
We look. 我们看 wo³ men² kan⁴
We’re looking. 我们在看。wo³ men zai⁴ kan⁴
Is the manager in the company? 经理在不在公司? jing¹ li³ zai⁴ bu² zai⁴ gong¹ si¹
No. He is at home. 不在。他在家里。bu² zai⁴. ta¹ zai⁴ jia¹ li³
What is he doing at home? 他在家干什么? ta¹ zai⁴ jia¹ gan⁴ shen² me
He is sleeping. 他在睡觉。ta¹ zai⁴ shui⁴ jiao⁴
Where are they? 他们在哪里? ta¹ men zai⁴ na³ li³
They are in the restaurant. 他们在饭店。ta¹ men zai⁴ fan⁴ dian⁴
What are they doing in the restaurant? 他们在饭店干什么? ta¹ men zai⁴ fan⁴ dian⁴ gan⁴ shen² me
They are eating in the restaurant. 他们在饭店吃饭。ta¹ men zai⁴ fan⁴ dian⁴ chi¹ fan⁴
Is your son in the school? 你的儿子在不在学校? ni³ er² zi zai⁴ bu² zai⁴ xue² xiao⁴
Yes. He is now in the library. 在，他现在在图书馆。zai⁴, ta¹ xian⁴ zai⁴ zai⁴ tu² shu¹ guan³
Is your boss in the factory? 你的老板在不在工厂? ni³ men³ de lao³ ban³ zai⁴ bu² zai⁴ gong¹ chang³
No. He is in the office. 不在，他在办公室。bu² zai⁴, ta¹ zai⁴ ban⁴ gong¹ shi⁴
What is he doing in the office? 他在办公室干什么? ta¹ zai⁴ ban⁴ gong¹ shi⁴ gan⁴ shen² me
He is writing there. 他在那里写东西。ta¹ zai⁴ na⁴ li⁴ xie³ dong¹ xi¹
OK! Here we have encountered a very special and important word in Chinese—

东西 dong¹xi¹

It actually means a thing, something or anything material or non-material. For instance—

What thing? Or What is it? 啥东西? sha² dong¹xi
What is this? 这是什么东西? zhe⁴ shi⁴ shen² me dong¹xi
Something good. 好东西. hao³ dong¹xi
shopping for something 买东西 mai³ dong¹xi
eating something 吃东西 chi¹ dong¹xi
What else? 还有什么东西? hai² you³ shen² me dong¹xi

It should be noted that the two characters in this word originally mean “east” and “west” respectively. However, when used for real direction, the two characters will be pronounced in their original tones, and not with the second changed into the light tone. Let’s compare.

east and west 东西 dong¹xi¹
east, west, south and north 东西南北 dong¹ xi¹ nan² bei³
a thing, something or anything 东西 dong¹xi
look for east and west, look for direction 找东西 zhao³ dong¹xi¹
look for something 找东西 zhao³ dong¹xi¹
What is he doing at home? 他在家干什么? ta¹ zai¹ jia¹ gan⁴ shen² me
He is looking for something at home. 他在家找东西。ta¹ zai¹ jia¹ zhao³ dong¹xi
What is he looking for? 他在找什么东西? ta¹ zai⁴ zhao³ shen² me
dong¹xi
He is looking for something important. 他在找重要的东西。ta¹ zai⁴ zhao³ zhong⁴ yao⁴ de dong¹xi
What are you doing? 你在干什么? ni³ zai⁴ gan⁴ shen² me
I am resting. 我在休息。wo³ zai⁴ xiu¹xi
Is your wife resting too? 你妻子也在休息吗? ni³ qi¹zi ye³ zai⁴ xiu¹xi ma¹
Yes. We are both resting. 是的，我们都在休息。shi⁴ de, wo³ men
dou¹ zai⁴ xiu¹xi
What are the children doing? 孩子们都在干什么？ hai² zimen dou¹ zai^4 gan^4 shen^2 me
The children are all sleeping. 孩子们都在睡觉。hai² zimen dou¹ zai^4 shui^4 jiao^4
In this lesson, we’ll learn how to ask for something and express our needs.

In this regard, the first word we need to know is 要, which is often interchangeable with the two-character word 想要. These two words basically mean “ask for”, “need” or “wish to have” and the particular meaning can be understood according to the context in which they are used.

What do you want? 你要什么? ni³ yao⁴ shen²me

Or
你想要什么? ni³ xiang³ yao⁴ shen²me
I want 我要 wo³ yao⁴

Or
literally I think and want 我想要 wo³ xiang³ yao⁴
I want this. 我要这个。wo³ yao⁴ zhe⁴ ge⁴
I want that. 我要那个。wo³ yao⁴ na⁴ ge⁴

Or
我想要这个。wo³ xiang³ yao⁴ zhe⁴ ge⁴
我想要那个。wo³ xiang³ yao⁴ na⁴ ge⁴

When you want more than one thing, you can use the conjunction like the English “and” — 和 (he²)

I want this and that. 我要这个和那个。wo³ yao⁴ zhe⁴ ge⁴ he² na⁴ ge⁴
I want some water. 我要，我想要一点水。wo³ yao⁴ wo³ xiang³ yao⁴ yi⁴ dian³ shui³
I want some food. 我要，我想要一点吃的。wo³ yao⁴ wo³ xiang³ yao⁴ yi⁴ dian³ chi¹ de
I want some drink. 我要，我想要一点喝的。wo³ yao⁴ wo³ xiang³ yao⁴ yi⁴ dian³ he¹ de
I want something to eat and drink. 我要一点吃的和喝的。wo³ yao⁴ yi⁴ dian³ chi¹ de he² he¹ de
I want some fruit. 我要，我想要一些水果。wo³ yao⁴ wo³ xiang³ yao⁴ yi⁴ xie¹ shui³ guo³
I want some Chinese dish. 我要，我想要一些中国菜。wo³ yao⁴ wo³ xiang³ yao⁴ yi⁴ xie¹ zhong¹ guo² cai⁴
I want some potatoes. 我要一些土豆。wo³ yao⁴ yi⁴ xie¹ tu³ dou⁴
I want some rice. 我要一些米饭。wo³ yao⁴ yi⁴ xie¹ mi³ fan⁴
I want some milk. 我要一些牛奶。wo³ yao⁴ yi⁴ xie¹ niu² nai³
I want a little sugar. 我要一些砂糖。wo³ yao⁴ yi⁴ xie¹ sha⁴ tang²
I want a little cheese. 我要一点奶酪。wo³ yao⁴ yi⁴ dian³ nai³ lao⁴

As we see, in Chinese, 一点 and 一些 respectively mean “a little” and “some”.
In casual and informal speech, the first character 一 is usually omitted in both, and the pronunciation of 点 is usually changed by adding the retroflex “r” as in the pronunciation of “worker” and “farmer” in American English. So let’s listen to the changes.

I want some water. 我想要一点水。wo³ xiang³ yao⁴ yi⁴ dian³ shui³
我想要点儿水。wo³ xiang³ yao⁴ dian‘r³ shui³
I want some food. 我想要一点吃的。wo³ xiang⁴ yao⁴ yi⁴ dian³ chi¹ de
我想要点儿吃的。wo³ xiang⁴ yao⁴ dian‘r³ chi¹ de
I want some drink. 我想要一点喝的。wo³ xiang³ yao⁴ yi⁴ dian³ he¹ de
我想要点儿喝的。wo³ xiang³ yao⁴ dian‘r³ he¹ de
I want something to eat and drink. 我要一点吃的和喝的。wo³ yao⁴ yi⁴ dian³ chi¹ de he² he¹ de
我要点儿吃的和喝的。wo³ yao⁴ dian‘r³ chi¹ de he² he¹ de
I want some fruit. 我想要一些水果。wo³ xiang³ yao⁴ yi⁴ xie¹ shui³ guo³
我想要些水果。wo³ xiang³ yao⁴ xie¹ shui³ guo³
I want some rice. 我要一些米饭。wo³ yao⁴ yi⁴ xie¹ mi³ fan⁴
我要些米饭。wo³ yao⁴ xie¹ mi³ fan⁴
I want a little sugar. 我想要一些砂糖。wo³ xiang³ yao⁴ yi¹ xie¹ sha¹ tang²
I want some milk. 我要一点牛奶。wo³ yao⁴ yi¹ dian³ niu² nai³
I want a little cheese. 我要一点奶酪。wo³ yao⁴ yi¹ dian³ nai³ lao⁴

If the thing you want is given in fixed portion, you can simply say
一份 yi² fen⁴
I want a breakfast. 我要一份早餐。wo³ yao⁴ yi² fen⁴ zao³ can¹
We want two lunches. 我们要两份午餐。wo³ men yao⁴ liang³ fen⁴ wu³ can¹
They need three dinners. 他们要三份晚餐。ta¹ men yao⁴ san¹ fen⁴ wan³ can¹
I want a dish. 我想要一份菜。wo³ xiang³ yao⁴ yi² fen⁴ cai⁴
I want a salad. 我要，或 我想要一份色拉。wo³ yao⁴ wo³ xiang³ yao⁴ yi² fen⁴ se⁴ la¹
I want one fried rice. 我要一份炒饭。wo³ yao⁴ yi² fen⁴ chao³ fan⁴
I want a steak. 我要一份肉排。wo³ yao⁴ yi² fen⁴ rou⁴ pai²

Now we have come to a very important matter in Chinese – that is, the number-measure word combination. As the name suggests, this combination is composed of a number and a word giving the measurement. In Chinese there are quite many measure words and their uses are highly customary, but the most important measure word is
个 ge⁴

This measure word can be used before a noun that refers to people.

one man, one person 一个人 yi² ge⁴ ren²
two sons 两个儿子 liang³ ge⁴ er² zi
three daughters 三个女儿 san¹ ge⁴ nv³ er²
four children 四个孩子 si⁴ ge⁴ hai² zi
five workers 五个工人 wu³ ge⁴ gong¹ ren²
six students 六个学生 liu⁴ ge⁴ xue²sheng¹
Depending on what people are being referred to, the Chinese may use other two words in place of 六, namely 位 and 名. The word 位 literally means “position” or “seat” and the word 名 means “name”.

four professors 四位教授 si¹ wei⁴ jiao⁴shou⁴
five leaders 五位领导 wu³ wei⁴ ling³dao³

“名” and “位” are used for persons only, with the latter more respectful.

different gentlemen 几位先生 ji³ wei⁴ xian¹sheng

位 is also used for many things that can be counted one by one.

six apples 六个苹果 liu⁴ ge⁴ ping²guo³
seven bananas 七个香蕉 qi¹ ge⁴ xiang¹jiao¹
eight oranges 八个橙子 ba¹ ge⁴ cheng²zi
nine eggs 九个鸡蛋 jiu³ ge⁴ ji¹dan⁴

In addition, nouns that refer to something abstract or non-material can also take this measure word.

seven questions 七个问题 qi¹ ge² wen⁴ti²
eight answers 八个答案 ba¹ ge⁴ da²an⁴
nine exercises 九个练习 jiu³ ge⁴ lian⁴xi²
ten ideas 十个想法 shi² ge⁴ xiang³fa³

However, on the whole, the use of the measure word 位 is highly customary and should be learned gradually from the native speakers. For example, it is right to use it before “month”, “week” and “hour” but not before “year”, “day”, “minute”.

a month 一个月 yi¹ ge⁴ yue⁴
two months 两个月 liang³ge⁴ yue⁴
a week 一个星期 yi² ge⁴ xing¹qi¹
two or three weeks 两、三个星期 liang³ san¹ ge⁴ xing¹qi¹
four hours 四个小时 si¹ ge⁴ xiao³shi²
a year 一年 yi² nian²
two years 两年 liang³ nian²
a day 一天 yi² tian¹
five days 五天 wu³ tian¹
six or seven minutes 六七分钟 liu⁴ qi¹ fen¹ zhong¹

All right! Please don’t be discouraged by this, because many Chinese measure words use something concrete and material as means of measure just as in English.

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OK! Now let’s go on and learn an important word that is often interchangeable with 要 or 想要.

need 需要 xu¹yao⁴
we need 我们需要 wo³men xu¹yao⁴
We need four glasses of orange juice. 我们需要四杯橙汁。wo³men xu¹yao⁴ si⁴ bei¹ cheng² zhi¹
they need 他们需要 ta¹men xu¹yao⁴
They need five glasses of apple juice. 他们需要五杯苹果汁。ta¹men xu¹yao⁴ wu³ bei¹ ping³ guo³ zhi¹
We need six bottles of beer. 我们需要六瓶啤酒。wo³men xu¹yao⁴ liu⁴ ping² jiu³
bottle 瓶 ping²
six bottles of beer 六瓶啤酒 liu⁴ ping² jiu³
one bottle of coke 一瓶可乐 yi⁴ ping² ke³ le⁴
one big bottle of coke 一大瓶可乐 yi² da⁴ ping² ke³ le⁴

OK! Please remember if the measure of something is not a specified container, we can simply use the word 份, which literally means a given appropriation of something. It is usually interchangeable with the most generally used measure word of 个.

a drink 一份饮料 yi² fen⁴ yin³ lia⁴
I want a drink. 我要一份饮料。wo³ yao⁴ yi² fen⁴ yin³ lia⁴
an ice cream 一份冰淇淋 yi² fen⁴ bing¹ qi² lin²
I’d like to have an ice cream. 我要一份冰淇淋。 wo³ yao⁴ yi² fen⁴ bing¹ qi² lin²
I’d like to have a breakfast. 我要一份早餐。wo³ yao⁴ yi² fen⁴ zao³ can¹
I’d like to have a dish. 我想要一份菜。wo³ xiang³ yao⁴ yi² fen⁴ cai¹
I want, or I’d like to have a salad. 我想要一份色拉。wo³ xiang³ yao⁴ yi² fen⁴ se⁴ la¹
I want fried rice. 我要一份炒饭。wo³ yao⁴ yi² fen⁴ chao³ fan⁴
I want a steak. 我要一份肉排。wo³ yao⁴ yi¹ fen⁴ rou⁴ pai²

In fact, the use of 份 as a measure word is also customary and should be learned by following the native speakers. However, if you are not sure
**which measure word to use, you probably can try to use 个. Listen and repeat the following**

I want that job. 我想要那份工作。wo³ xiang³yao⁴ na⁴ fen⁴ gong¹zuo⁴

I need this newspaper. 我需要这份报纸。wo³ xu¹yao⁴ zhe⁴ fen⁴ bao⁴zhi³

I want this magazine. 我想要这份杂志。wo³ xiang³yao⁴ zhe⁴ fen⁴ za²zhi⁴

OK! Now let’s learn a few more words that use different containers as measurement.

**a small box, a case or packet 盒 he²**

I want a box of chocolate. 我要一盒巧克力。wo³ yao⁴ yi⁴ he² qiao³ke⁴li⁴

I want a packet of cigarettes. 我要一盒香烟。wo³ xiang³yao⁴ yi⁴ he² xiang¹yan¹

**a package, a packet, or a parcel 包 bao¹**

I need a packet of paper napkins. 我需要一包餐巾纸。wo³ xu¹yao⁴ yi⁴ bao¹ can¹jin¹zhi³

I need a packet of tissues. 我需要一包手纸。wo³ xu¹yao⁴ yi⁴ bao¹ shou³zhi³

**a tray, a dish 盘 pan²**

I need a dish of salad. 我需要一盘色拉。wo³ xu¹yao⁴ yi⁴ pan² se¹la¹

I want a tray of peanuts. 我要一盘花生。wo³ yao⁴ yi⁴pan² hua¹sheng¹

**a bowl 碗 wan³**

I’d like to have a bowl of rice. 我想要一碗米饭。wo³ xiang³yao⁴ yi⁴ wan³ mi³fan⁴

I’d like to have a bowl of fried noodles. 我要一碗炒面。wo³ yao⁴ yi⁴ wan³ chao³mian⁴
Good! Now let’s come back to the question to ask if someone wants anything.

**What do you want?** 你要什么？ni³ yao⁴ shen²me

*Or*

**What do you want to ask for?** 你想要什么？ni³ xiang³yao⁴ shen²me

The same questions can also be asked in a more informal and casual way, as the following.

你想要点儿什么？ni³ xiang³yao⁴ dian’r³ shen²me
你要点儿什么？ni³ yao⁴ dian’r³ shen²me

Here, the Chinese expression for “a little” 一点 is made informal and casual through the pronunciation change called Er-hua, that is, by adding the retroflex sound of Er as in the American English pronunciation of “worker” and “farmer”.

你想要点儿什么？ni³ xiang³ yao⁴ dian’r³ shen²me
你要点儿什么？ni³ yao⁴ dian’r³ shen²me

I’d like to have a salad and a steak. 我要一盘色拉和一份肉排。wo³ yao⁴ yi⁴ pan² se’la¹ he² yi² fen⁴ niu² pai²
I’d like to have fried noodles and a drink. 我要一碗炒面和一份饮料。wo³ yao⁴ yi² wan³ chao³ mian⁴ he² yi² fen⁴ yin³ liao⁴
What about him? 他呢？ta¹ ne
He would like a fried rice, a dish and a bottle of beer. 他要一份炒饭，一份菜和一瓶啤酒。ta¹ yao⁴ yi² fen⁴ chao³ mian⁴ yi² fen⁴ cai⁴ he² yi⁴ ping² pi² jiu³

Now we should remember that there is a difference between 一点 or 一点儿 and 一些. This is, 一点 or 一点儿 means “a little” while 一些 means “some”. As with 一点 or 一点儿, the character 一 can also be omitted.

**What would you like to have? (you in the plural)** 你们要些什么？ni³men yao⁴ xie shen²me

Listen to the following answers.
A cup of coffee. 一杯咖啡。yi⁴ bei¹ ka¹ fei¹
Two cups of tea. 两杯茶。liang³ bei¹ cha²
One green tea and another black tea. 一杯绿茶和一杯红茶。yi⁴ bei¹ lv⁴ cha² he² yi⁴ bei¹ hong² cha²
Three glasses of red wine. 三杯红酒。san¹ bei¹ hong² jiu³
A glass of brandy. 一杯白兰地。yi⁴ bei¹ bai² lan² di⁴
A cup of whisky. 一杯威士忌。yi⁴ bei¹ wei¹ shi¹ ji⁴
Four glasses of coke. 四杯可乐。si⁴ bei¹ ke³ le⁴
Anything else? 还要什么吗？hai² yao⁴ shen² me ma¹
Oh, yes. And a packet of cigarettes and a packet of paper napkins. 哦，还要一包香烟和一包餐巾纸。o hai² yao⁴ yi⁴ bao¹ xiang¹ yan¹ he² yi⁴ bao¹ can¹ jin¹ zhi³
Anything more? 还有吗？hai² you³ ma¹
Nothing more. 没有了。mei² you³ le

All right! Now you have learned quite many useful expressions to express what you want and need. If you are not sure you have already learned them by heart, just go through it once more. If you do, you can go on to the next lesson.
LESSON 9

HOW MUCH IS IT?:

In Chinese, many words are formed by two characters that have opposite meanings. Here we have an example.

many or much 多 duo¹
few or little 少 shao³
How many or how much? 多少? duo¹ shao³
literally how much money or simply how much? 多少钱? duo¹ shao³ qian²

To answer this question, we need to use combinations of numbers and words of money unit. Now, let’s first learn the basic numbers.

1, 2, 3, 4 一 yi¹, 二 er⁴, 三 san¹, 四 si⁴
5, 6, 7, 8, 五 wu³, 六 liu⁴, 七 qi¹, 八 ba¹
9, 10, 0, 九 jiu³, 十 shi², 零 ling²
11, 12, 13 十一 shi² yi¹, 十二 shi² er⁴, 十三 shi² san¹
14, 15, 16 十四 shi² si⁴, 十五 shi² wu³, 十六 shi² liu⁴
60, 50, 40 六十 liu¹ shi², 五十 wu³ shi², 四十 si⁴ shi²
77, 88, 99 七十七 qi¹ shi² qi¹, 八十八 ba¹ shi² ba¹, 九十九 jiu³ shi² jiu³

100 一百 yi⁴ bai³
1,000 一千 yi⁴ qian¹
10,000 一万 yi² wan⁴
100,000 十万 shi² wan⁴
da million 一百万 yi⁴ bai³ wan⁴

As we see in the above, Chinese is different from the English in that it has ten thousand as an independent unit, 万 which does not exist in English.
All right! Now we need to know the Chinese money unit.

money 钱 qian²
the Chinese dollar 元 yuan²
the Chinese dime 角 jiao³
the Chinese cent 分 fen¹

It should be noted that both the Chinese dollar 元 and dime 角 have a more frequently used informal word. They are—

块 kuai⁴
毛 mao²

Now let’s say the following as a practice.

one yuan, a Chinese dollar 一块 yi² kuai⁴
¥1.23 一块两毛三分 yi² kuai⁴ liang³ mao² san¹ fen¹
¥2.32 两块三毛二分 liang³ kuai⁴ san¹ mao² er⁴ fen¹
¥3.45 三块四毛五 san¹ kuai⁴ si⁴ mao² wu³
¥5.67 五块六毛七 wu³ kuai⁴ liu⁴ mao² qi¹
¥7.89 七块八毛九 qi¹ kuai⁴ ba¹ mao² jiu³
¥10.10 十块一毛 shi² kuai⁴ yi¹ mao²
¥10.01 十块零一分 shi² kuai⁴ ling² yi¹ fen¹
¥11.98 十一块九毛八 shi² yi¹ kuai⁴ jiu³ mao² ba¹
¥12.89 十二块八毛九 shi² er⁴ kuai⁴ ba¹ mao² jiu³
¥23.76 二十三块七毛六 er⁴ shi² san¹ kuai⁴ qi¹ mao² liu⁴
¥32.54 三十二块五毛四 san¹ shi² er⁴ kuai⁴ wu³ mao² si⁴
¥43.32 四十三块三毛二 si⁴ shi² san¹ kuai⁴ san¹ mao² er⁴
¥54.23 五十四块两毛三 wu³ shi² si⁴ kuai⁴ liang³ mao² san¹

Do you notice that we have so far used two different words for the number two? Yes! They are 二 and 两. They are the same in meaning but are often used differently, while 二 is normally used along with other numbers, 两 often goes with a measure word; but on the whole, the choice is still customary. Let’s listen again.

¥1.23 一块两毛三分 yi² kuai⁴ liang³ mao² san¹ fen¹
¥2.32 两块三毛二分 liang³ kuai⁴ san¹ mao² er⁴ fen¹
There is also another difference between 二 and 两, that is, while 二 is always used as a number word, the word 两 is also a Chinese measure unit itself, it is a tenth of the measurement 斤 that equals to half a kilogram. So a 斤 is 500 grams and a 两 50 grams. Listen!

50 grams 一两 yi⁴ liang³
100 grams 二两 er⁴ liang³

Although the measurement of 斤 and 两 are used generally as a national standard units, the international metric system is also adopted.

one kilogram 一公斤 yi⁴ gong¹ jin¹
one gram 一克 yi² ke⁴
One kilogram is 1,000 grams. 一公斤是一千克。yi⁴ gong¹ jin¹ shi⁴ yi⁴ qian¹ ke⁴
One kilogram is two Chinese Jin. 一公斤是两市斤。yi⁴ gong¹ jin¹ shi⁴ liang² shi⁴ jin¹
One Chinese Jin is 500 grams. 一市斤是五百克。yi² shi⁴ jin¹ shi⁴ wu³ bai³ ke⁴
One Chinese Jin is half a kilogram. 一市斤是半公斤。yi² shi⁴ jin¹ shi⁴ ban⁴ gong¹ jin¹
Half a kilogram is one Chinese Chinese Jin. 半公斤是一市斤。ban⁴ gong¹ jin¹ shi⁴ yi² shi⁴ jin¹
One Chinese Jin is ten Chinese Liang. 一市斤是十两。yi² shi⁴ jin¹ shi⁴ shi² liang³
One kilogram is 20 Chinese Liang. 一公斤是二十两。yi⁴ gong¹ jin¹ shi⁴ er⁴ shi² liang³
One Chinese Liang is 50 grams. 一两是五十克。yi⁴ liang³ shi⁴ wu³ shi² ke⁴
Half a Chinese Liang is 25 grams. 半两是二十五克。ban⁴ liang³ shi⁴ er⁴ shi² wu³ ke⁴

So in the above we have also learned the word for half, namely, 半. Here is another word that we need to learn.
each or per 每 mei³
each one 每个 mei³ ge⁴
each person 每个人 mei³ ge⁴ ren²
each kilogram, per kilogram 每公斤 mei³ gong¹jin¹

All right! Now we will learn what to say when going shopping in the market place convenience store. Let’s listen and repeat.

What do you want? Or What can I do for you? 你要什么？ni³ yao⁴ shen²me
I’d like to have ... 我想要……wo³ xiang³yao⁴
six apples 六个苹果 liu⁴ ge⁴ ping¹guo³
seven bananas 七个香蕉 qi¹ ge⁴ xiang¹jiao¹
eight oranges 八个橙子 ba¹ ge⁴ cheng²zi
nine eggs 九个鸡蛋 jiu³ ge⁴ ji¹dan⁴
How much are these? 这些多少钱？zhe⁴ xie¹ duo¹shao³ qian²
These are all sold by weight. 这些都按重量卖。zhe⁴ xie¹ dou¹ an¹ zhong⁴liang⁴ mai⁴
by weight 按重量 an¹ zhong⁴liang⁴
not by quantity 不按数量 bu⁴ an¹ zhong⁴laing⁴

The word 重量 literally translates into English as “weight measure” or “weight amount”.

How much is the weight? 重量是多少？zhong⁴liang⁴ shi⁴ duo¹shao³
not very heavy 不太重 bu² tai⁴ zhong⁴
every heavy 很重 hen³ zhong⁴
every light 很轻 hen³ qing²

When asking for the price, the following expressions can be used.

How much money? 多少钱？duo¹shao³ qian²
What is the price? 什么价钱？shen² me jia⁴qian²
Or 价钱是多少？jia⁴ qian² shi⁴ duo¹shao³
Literally how is it sold? 怎么卖？zen³me mai⁴
Now we have learned the Chinese for “sell” is 卖 (mai4), we also need to know the word for “buy”. It is a word with the same pronunciation but said in a different tone. Listen and repeat.

买 mai3
These two words can combine to form a new word.
buy and sell, or simply business 买卖 mai3 mai4
do business 做买卖 zuo mai3 mai4
In fact, the word 价钱 for price can be pronounced in the originals two second tones or with 钱 changed to the light tone.
价钱 (originals) jia4 qian2
价钱 (changed light tone ending) jia4 qian

So, let’s listen to repeat.

What price is this? 这是什么价钱？zhe4 shi4 shen2 me jia4 qian2
What’s the price of this? 这个价钱是多少？zhe4 ge4 jia4 qian2 shi4
duo1 shao3
What prices are these? 这些是什么价钱？zhe4 xie1 shi4 shen2 me jia4 qian2
How is that sold? 那个怎么卖？na4 ge4 zen3 me mai4
How much is that? 那个是多少钱？na4 ge4 shi4 duo1 shao3 qian2
How much is this? 这个是多少钱？zhe4 ge4 shi4 duo1 shao3 qian2

When giving the price of an item, the seller may choose to say either the measurement unit or the money first.

Six yuan per kilo. 一公斤六块钱。yi4 gong1 jin1 liu4 kuai4 qian2
Six yuan per kilo. 六块钱一公斤。liu4 kuai4 qian2 yi4 gong1 jin1
Twelve yuan per kilo. 一公斤十二块。yi4 gong1 jin1 shi2 er4 kuai4
Twelve yuan per kilo. 十二块钱一公斤。shi2 er4 kuai4 qian2 yi4 gong1 jin1

To make a bargain, you will find the following expressions very useful.

It’s too expensive. 太贵了。tai4 gui4 le
Would you make it a little cheaper? 便宜点儿好吧？pian2 yi4 dian3 r3 hao3 ba
Make it still cheaper. 再便宜点儿吧。zai4 pian yi4 dian3 er ba
Can you make it a little cheaper still? 能不能再便宜一点？neng² bu⁴ neng² zai⁴ pian² yi⁴ yi⁴ dian³
Please give me a discount. 给我打个折吧。gei³ wo³ da³ ge⁴ zhe² ba
It’s still too expensive. 还是太贵了。hai² shi⁴ tai⁴ gui⁴ le

In the mean time, you should understand what the seller may probably say.

This is not expensive. 这不贵。zhe⁴ bu² gui⁴
This is really not expensive. 这真的不贵。zhe⁴ zhen¹ de bu² gui⁴
It’s already very cheap. 已经很便宜了。yi³ jing¹ hen³ pian² yi⁴ le
It really can’t be cheaper. 真的不能再便宜了。zhen¹ de bu⁴ neng² zai⁴ pian² yi⁴ le
It’s the bottom price. 这已经是最低价了。zhe⁴ yi³ jing¹ shi⁴ zui⁴ di¹ jia⁴ le

Now we have learned the Chinese superlative adverb 最，we need to know the word for the comparative degree: 更 geng⁴. It’s in the fourth tone too, as the superlative.

lower 更低
lowest 最低
more expensive 更贵
most expensive 最贵
cheaper 更便宜
cheapest 最便宜
better 更好
best 最好

From the above we have learned the adverb for “already”, 已经. And we have also used two sentence final words that have no translation equivalents in English, 吧 and 了. While 吧 is used for adding a tone of suggestion or pleading, 了 indicates an affirmative end of the sentence, meaning that the speaker has a firm opinion or attitude. For emphasis, the affirmative tone could be made even stronger by changing 了 into 啦.

It’s too expensive. 太贵啦！tai⁴ gui⁴ la
It’s still too expensive. 还是太贵啦！hai² shi⁴ tai⁴ gui⁴ la
How much is it?: 多少？

It's already very cheap. 已经很便宜啦！yi³ jing¹ hen³ pian² yi⁴ la
Come on! It can’t be made cheaper. 好啦！不能再便宜啦！hao³ la bu⁴ neng² zai¹ pian² yi⁴ la

All right! Now let’s go on to listen to some sentences using the expressions we have learned.

How much is for a jin or half a kilo of apples 苹果多少钱一斤？
ing² guo³ duo¹ shao³ qian² yi⁴ jin¹
￥2.85 for a Chinese Jin. 每斤两块八毛五。mei³ jin¹ liang³ kuai² ba¹ mao² wu³
It is 2.2 Jin. 这是两斤二两。zhe⁴ shi⁴ liang³ jin¹ er⁴ liang³
It’s worth ￥6.27. 需要六块两毛七。xu¹ yao⁴ liu⁴ kuai² liang³ mao² qi¹

How about the bananas and orange? 香蕉和橙子呢？xiang¹ jiao¹ he² cheng² zi ne
Banana is ￥3.50 for half a kilogram. 香蕉是一斤三块五。xiang¹ jiao¹ yi⁴ jin¹ san¹ kuai² wu³
This is one kilogram and a half, three Chinese Jin. 这是一公斤半。zhe⁴ shi⁴ yi⁴ gong¹ jin² ban⁴
Is one kilogram and half two and half Chinese Jin? 一公斤半是两斤半吗？yi³ gong¹ jin¹ ban⁴ shi⁴ lai² jin¹ ban⁴ ma¹
No. It is three Chinese Jin. 不是，是三斤。bu² shi⁴ shi⁴ san¹ jin¹
Then, how much is it? 那么，多少钱呢？na¹ me shi⁴ duo¹ shao³ qian² ne
Three Chinese Jin is for ￥10.50. 三斤是十块五毛钱。san¹ jin¹ shi⁴ shi² kuai⁴ ling² wu³ mao² qian²

How about the oranges? 橙子呢？cheng² zi ne
Oranges are ￥4.65 for half a kilogram. 橙子是四块六毛五十一斤。
cheng² zi shi⁴ si¹ kuai² liu⁴ mao² wu³ yi⁴ jin¹
How much is the weight? 重量是多少？zhong⁴ liang⁴ shi⁴ duo¹ shao³ qian²
It weighs two kilograms, or four Chinese Jin. 重量是两公斤，四斤。zhong⁴ liang⁴ shi⁴ liang³ gong¹ jin¹ si¹ jin¹
How much money? 多少钱？duoshao³ qian²
Four Chinese Jin are for ￥18.60. 两公斤是十八块六。liang³ gong¹ jin¹ shi⁴ shi² ba¹ kuai² liu⁴
How about the nine eggs? 九个鸡蛋呢？jiu³ ge⁴ ji¹ dan⁴ ne
Eggs are at ￥3.70 for half a kilogram. 鸡蛋的价钱是每斤三块七。ji¹ dan⁴ de jia⁴ ge² shi¹ mei³ jin¹ sanⁱ kuai³ qi¹
9 eggs are 550 grams, for ￥4.07. 九个鸡蛋是一斤一两，要四块零七分。jiu³ ge⁴ ji¹ dan⁴ shi⁴ yi⁴ jin¹ yi⁴ liang³ yao⁴ si⁴ kuai⁴ ling² qi¹ fen¹
Do you want anything else? 还要别的吗？hai² yao⁴ bie² de ma¹
other or else 别的 bie² de

Anything else? 还要别的吗？hai² yao⁴ bie² de ma¹
Oh, yes! I need some other things. 哦，对了！还要一些东西。o
dui⁴ le hai² yao⁴ yi¹ xie² dong¹ xi
What? 什么? shen² me
Vegetable, meat and fish. 蔬菜，肉和鱼。shu¹ cai⁴ rou⁴ he² yu²
What vegetable? 什么蔬菜? shen² me shu¹ cai⁴
Carrot, onion and cabbage. 胡萝卜，洋葱，白菜。hu² luo² bo
yang² cong¹ bai² cai⁴
Anything else? 还有吗? hai² you³ ma¹
And cucumber and tomato. 还有黄瓜和西红柿。hai² you³
huang² gua¹ he² xi¹ hong² shi⁴
What about meat and fish? 肉和鱼呢? rou⁴ he² yu² ne
This kind of fish and that kind of meat. 这种肉，那种鱼。zhe⁴
zhong³ rou⁴ na⁴ zhong³ yu²
Is that all? 就这些了吧？jiu⁴ zhe⁴ xie¹ le ba
Yes. That’s all. 是的。就这些了。shi¹ de jiu⁴ zhe⁴ xie¹ le
How much is the total? 一共多少钱？yi² gong⁴ duo¹ shao³ qian²
How much is the total? 总共多少钱？zong³ gong⁴ duo¹ shao³ qian²
Oh, let me see. 哦，让我看看。o rang⁴ wo³ kan⁴ kan
Or literally let me calculate. 让我算算。rang⁴ wo³ suan⁴ suan
The total is ￥135.02. 一共是一百三十五元零二分。yi² gong⁴ shi⁴
yi⁴ bai³ san¹ shi² wu³ yaun² ling² er⁴ fen¹
Here is ￥150.00. 这是一百五十块。zhe⁴ shi⁴ yi⁴ bai³ wu³ shi² kuai⁴
All right! Here is your change, ￥14.98. 这是找给您的，十四块九
毛八。zhe² shi⁴ zhao³ ge³ nin² de shi² si⁴ kuai⁴ jiu³ mao² ba¹
Thank you! 谢谢！xie⁴ xie
Not at all. 没什么。mei² shen² me