

Pin Yin

Transliteration of chinese sounds
many letters correspond to English usage

however

q = ch sound

x = sh (hissing) sound

written as combination words even though
characters are separate

Example

Putong hua

普通话

Greetings : Ni hao

Ni hao = Are you well? Lit. “you good?”

You are asking whether someone is doing well. It is equivalent to “How are you?”

The answer is usually “ni hao”.

If you wanted to answer you could say:

Wo hen hao = Fine. I am doing well.

lit. “I very good”

If things are not going well you could say

bu hao = not well/not good.

The good news about the Chinese language

1. No plural forms
2. No gender forms

Wo = I

Ni = you

Ta = he/she

Women = we

Nimen = y'all

Tamen = they

More good news about the Chinese language

3. No verb forms! Time is determined from context.

Wo qu = I go

Wo ming tian qu = I tomorrow go

Wo zuo tian qu = I yesterday go

4. There are standard helper verbs

Wo qu le = I went

Wo yao qu = I will go

Wo hui qu = I may go

Wo neng qu = I can go

Even more good news about the Chinese language

5. Numbers are very logical

0 = ling

1 = yi

2 = er

3 = san

4 = si

5 = wu

6 = liu

7 = qi

8 = ba

9 = jiu

10 = shi

Even more good news about the Chinese language

5. Numbers are very logical

100 = bai

1000 = qian

10,000 = wan

Now you know everything.

Examples:

17 = ten seven = shi qi

21 = two ten one = er shi yi

301 = san bai ling yi

2008 (year) = er ling ling ba (nian)

All right there is one catch

5. The number 2 is “liang” in front of any noun including

100 = bai

1000 = qian

10,000 = wan

Example,

liang bai = 200

liang qian = 2000

liang wan = 20,000

liang ge ren = two people

Some good and some bad news about the Chinese language

6. No definite article

che = car, the car

however, there is an indefinite article

yi liang che = a car

liang is a measure word that refers to vehicles

there are demonstrative pronouns (this,that)

zhe liang che = this car

na liang che = that car

and adjectives

lan se che = blue car, the blue car

The bad news about the Chinese language

1. Tones. There are four tones.

I. Flat II. Rising III. Falling/Rising IV. Falling



2. Most Chinese words are homonyms

Example: shi

shi has more than 60 meanings

Even shi⁴ which is the fourth tone of shi has more than 30 meanings

尸 [shi1] /corpse/
失 [shi1] /to lose/to miss/to fail/
虱 [shi1] /louse/
尸 [shi1] /corpse/
施 [shi1] /(surname)/distribute (alms)/to do/to execute/to carry out/
师 [shi1] /a division (milit.)/teacher/master/expert/model/
狮 [shi1] /lion/
诗 [shi1] /poem/poetry/verse/
湿 [shi1] /moist/wet/
著 [shi1] /Achillea sibirica/
十 [shi2] /ten/
什 [shi2] /tenth/
石 [shi2] /rock/stone/
拾 [shi2] /pick up/ten (fraudproof)/
食 [shi2] /animal feed/eat/food/
时 [shi2] /O'clock/time/when/hour/season/period/
埘 [shi2] /hen roost/
实 [shi2] /real/true/honest/really/solid/
蚀 [shi2] /eat up slowly/eclipse/
识 [shi2] /to know/knowledge/
蒔 [shi2] /Peuceclanum gravelens/to plant/
鲋 [shi2] /shad/Ilisha elongata/
史 [shi3] /history/
矢 [shi3] /arrow/dart/
豕 [shi3] /hog/swine/
使 [shi3] /to make/to cause/to enable/to use/to employ/messenger/
始 [shi3] /begin/
屎 [shi3] /stool/feces/
驶 [shi3] /hasten/proceed to/sail a vessel/
士 [shi4] /scholar/warrior/knight/

To save resource, we only display 30 results at most for each query.

士 [shi4] /scholar/warrior/knight/
氏 [shi4] /clan name/maiden name/
世 [shi4] /life/age/generation/era/world/lifetime/
仕 [shi4] /an official/
市 [shi4] /market/city/
示 [shi4] /to show/reveal/
式 [shi4] /type/form/pattern/style/
事 [shi4] /matter/thing/item/work/affair/
侍 [shi4] /attend on/
室 [shi4] /room/
恃 [shi4] /rely upon/
拭 [shi4] /wipe/
是 [shi4] /is/are/am/yes/to be/
柿 [shi4] /persimmon/
舐 [shi4] /to lick/lap/
逝 [shi4] /depart/die/
视 [shi4] /to look at/to regard/to inspect/
势 [shi4] /conditions/influence/tendency/
嗜 [shi4] /addicted to/fond of/
弑 [shi4] /murder a superior/
筮 [shi4] /divine by stalk/
置 [shi4] /to install/to place/to put/
试 [shi4] /to test/to try/experiment/examination/test/
轼 [shi4] /crossbar in carriage front/
饰 [shi4] /adorn/ornaments/
誓 [shi4] /oath/vow/to swear/to pledge/
适 [shi4] /to fit/to suit/
噬 [shi4] /devour/to bite/
螫 [shi4] /to sting/
释 [shi4] /explain/to release/

To save resource, we only display 30 results at most for each query.

How is it possible to communicate in Chinese?

The idea of having so many meanings for one word seems impossible to us. Do you really need to know all of those meanings?

Chinese people know which meaning is intended from context.

Wo shi = I am

Clearly, this shi does not mean rock but it means “am”. The word rock is usually a compound word.

Wo shi yan shi = I am a rock

How is it possible to communicate in Chinese?

An attribute is expressed using the universal preposition “de”

Wo shi cheng shi de = I am honest
cheng shi = honest

Since honest is an adjective it takes the connecting word “de”

Example:

Wo shuo putong hua = I speak Mandarin
Wo shuo putong hua shuo de bu hao = I do not speak Mandarin well

Common topics

“Where do you come from?”

This is an obvious thing to ask and is typically asked early on in any conversation.

Ni shi na guo ren?

You are which country person?

Ni shi nali de ren?

You are where from person?

Wo shi mei guo ren

More bad news : measure words

Any time a word is preceded by a preposition or number it also uses a measure word. We have this too, but it is not as developed.

English

geese

a flock of geese

that flock of geese

flock is a measure word for geese, sheep
etc.

More bad news : measure words

In Chinese everything has a measure word:

shu = book, yi ben shu = a book

xue = snow, yi chang xue = a (field of) snow

che = car, yi liang che = a car

lu = road, yi tiao lu = a road

cheng shi = city, yi ge cheng shi = a city

“ge” is the most common (almost universal) measure word. Many Chinese people use it even when it is not formally correct.

Example,

yi ge che = a car

Mandarin = Putong Hua

The dominant language in media, government and now a means of communication for most Chinese.

However, most people have a native dialect/language that is different from putong hua. Thus, their pronunciation may differ.

Example,

I am an American

wo shi mei guo ren (putong hua)

ngo zi mei go zen (hangzhou hua)