

## UNIT 3 TOPIC 7 THE CHINESE LANGUAGE

### Pre-knowledge

Before class, students should read Unit 3 Topic 7 to gain a basic understanding of the Chinese language, the *pinyin* and Chinese writing systems.

### Aim and Objectives

Topic 7 aims to provide students with some knowledge of the Chinese language, its key attributes and the various names it is known by. It will also equip them with some knowledge of the key concepts of the *pinyin* system and how foreign words entered the Chinese language. They will also learn about Chinese homophones.

### Teaching and Learning Activities

#### Activity 1

Have your students conduct a survey in the class to find out the different pronunciations and usage of the same words in different dialects. They then have to write a brief report of their findings. Two words are given below:

	Mandarin	Cantonese	Hakka	Hokkien	Shanghainese
红薯					
锅					

You may use this as an example:

闽南话原文	普通话意译
狗蚁搬家槽出动，挨挨阵阵无闲工。 半路拄着大蜈蚣，狗蚁汰讨甘愿放？ 逐个和齐斗相共，拼死拼活扛蜈蚣。	蚂蚁搬家出洞口，一排长阵不见头。 半路碰上大蜈蚣，天赐良机不可丢。 团结一心齐战斗，不获全胜不罢休。

#### Activity 2

Have your students study terms of address in Chinese family relationships and discuss these questions:

- How are these terms formed?
- What do these terms represent?
- Have there been any changes in family terms in the last 50 years?

#### Activity 3

Have your students compare English and Chinese social terms. They then have to write an article for a magazine to discuss how family terms such as 叔叔 and 阿姨 are used as social terms in Chinese and the reasons for such usage.

#### Activity 4

Have your students collect some new words that were formed in the last 30 years such as 的士, 打的, 按揭 and 洪荒之力. They have to find out the origins and then discuss the impact of these new words.

### Activity 5

Have your students analyse these sentences and discuss the impact of Internet language on the language used in real life:

- “我就鸡冻起来，忙问，‘你还有木有啊？’”
- “这事简直把我笑屎了，可他却一点笑容也木有，当我问他肿么了时，他说，‘这事有什么好笑的？’仿佛他天生就少了笑神经似的。”
- 最近有位叫“新津春子”的中国大妈在日本火的不要不要的。因为最会打扫卫生，她被封为日本“国宝级匠人”。

### Activity 6

Help your students extend their vocabulary using key characters.

You may use this as an example:

- 以“球”为中心来组词
- 构词：地球、月球、足球、篮球、环球、气球、眼球、全球、板羽球、康乐球、乒乓球、克郎球、吹球、槌球、白血球、红血球、卵球、保健球、保龄球、琉璃球、滚球、星球、排球、曲棍球、点球、麻球、马球、火球、头球、角球、天球、高压球、高尔夫球、吃球、持球、卫生球、托球、椭圆球、北半球、南半球、半球、板球、拍球、棒球、色球、地滚球、垒球、台球、投球、发球、罚球、传球、煤球、死球、练球、链球、铅球、铁球、金球、进球、红球、黄球、蓝球、白球、摆球、颜色球、顶球、定球、抢球、争球、大球、小球、越位球、水球、橄榄球、冰球、手球、首球、界外球、界内球、气球、搓球、皮球、羽毛球、混球、浑球、彩球、开球、送球、松球、扣球、绒球、篮板球、羊脂球、药球、棉球、网球、壁球、擦边球、输球、赢球、丢球、捡球、毽球、带球、踢球、藤球、吊球、鸡球、击球、虾球、肉球、米球、桌球、撞球、塑料球、高球、玻璃球、国球、杀球、抽球、臭球、好球、盘球、花球、飞球、灯球、毛球、绣球、羽球、铲球、拿球、抛球、断球、短球、长球、门球、跳球、运球、勾球、脑球、抱球

### Activity 7

Have your students analyse these Chinese characters and discuss how the Chinese culture is reflected in Chinese characters.



食



即



既



鄉 (“乡”的繁体字)

Share with your students this saying and explain its meaning: 寓事于书, 寓书于文, 寓文于字, 寓句于字.

### Activity 8

Watch the crosstalk show 北京话 performed by Hou Baolin (侯宝林) on YouTube (available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=89Gx\\_S4Ru08](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=89Gx_S4Ru08)). Have a class discussion on the characteristics of the Beijing dialect. You may ask some students to imitate the performance.

### Activity 9

Have your students do Exercise 7 of the Workbook according to your teaching needs and progress.

### Resources/Materials

Apart from those listed in the activities, you may also consult these resources/materials:

Daniel Kane, *The Chinese Language, its History and Current Usage*, Tuttle Publishing, 2006

Jerry Norman, *Chinese*, Cambridge University Press, 1988

John DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy*, University of Hawaii Press, 1984

### Assessment

1. Collect the notes taken by your students during all group and class discussions.
2. Students are required to prepare PowerPoint presentations for Activities 1 and 6.
3. Students are required to design their own questions for Activity 2.

### Workbook Answer Key

1. Internet Search  
Mark the key regions where each of the seven major groups of Chinese dialects is spoken on a map of China. Write down a short description of each dialect, with information such as when it was first spoken.
2. What is Standard Mandarin? How many different terms are there that refer to the Chinese language? Write down these terms and where they are used in the table below.

Term	Places where it is used
Chinese	United Nations
普通话, which translates to “common speech”	China
國語 / 国语, which means “national language”	Taiwan
华语, which means “Chinese language”	Malaysia and Singapore

Standard Mandarin is based on, but not identical to, the Beijing dialect. It is the form of speech most people in China learn.

3. What is *pinyin*? What are the three basic elements in *pinyin*?

Students should consider these points:

*Pinyin* is the Romanisation of Chinese characters based on their pronunciations. The word *pinyin* literally translates into “spell sound”. This means that it spells out Chinese characters using letters from the English alphabet.

A Mandarin syllable consists of three components, an initial, a final and a tone.

*Pinyin* uses the same letters as the English alphabet except for the letter v. It also has an additional ū. All consonants represent the same sounds in English except the following:

- Letters b, d and g are the unaspirated versions of letters p, t and k. This simply means that they are pronounced in the way letters p, t and k are pronounced after the letter s (as in spy, sty, and sky). The crucial difference is subtle enough, though, that many Chinese phrasebooks do not point it out.
- Letters q, x, z and c are pronounced more like letters ch, sh, ds and ts in cheap, she, suds and cats respectively.
- Letters zh, ch, sh and r are known as the retroflex initials – they should be pronounced with the tongue curled backwards.

Since *pinyin* was designed to represent phonetics, it is entirely consistent on how combinations of initials and finals should be pronounced. These are some conventions and shortcuts:

- Finals ui, un and iu are shortcuts for uei, uen and iou, and so should always be pronounced as such.
- Letter ū is written simply as a u (no ūmlaut) when it follows the letters j, q, x or y.
- Letter i represents three different sounds dependent on the initial that precedes it. When it follows the sibilant initials (z, c, s), it sounds like "zz". When it follows the retroflex initials (zh, ch, sh and r), it sounds like "rr". In all other cases, it sounds like the English "ee".

The Chinese language is a tonal language, where differences in tones change the meanings of words. Since it has a limited number of syllables, there are many homophones whose meaning varies with the tone. For example, for the syllable ma, we can assemble this sentence: 妈妈骂马吗? , where the *pinyin* is “māma mà mǎ ma?”. Pronounced properly, the sentence means “Does mama scold the horse?”.

The Chinese language has four basic tones. Tone marks are placed on the main vowels (on letters a or e if they are present, on letter o in the ou final and on the last vowel in all other cases). There is also a neutral tone which does not carry any tone mark.

#### 4. How is the Chinese language different from the English language?

Students should consider these points:

Chinese	English
Focuses on the meaning; sentences are usually short with just a couple of modifiers, or it will cause confusion in meaning; in learning Chinese, one should “get the meaning, forget the words” (得意忘形).	Emphasises the structure; several meanings can be expressed clearly in just one sentence but sentences are usually long with a complex structure.
Usually has many sentences, each containing one meaning and connected by commas.	Usually has many clauses in one sentence, making it much more complicated.
Use of nouns to replace pronouns due to short sentence structure.	Use of many pronouns (we, you, they, she, etc.) and determiners (that, which) to keep a sentence well-structured and clear in meaning (non-repeating).
Active voice is often used; what is written in the passive voice in English often becomes expressed in the active voice in	Passive voice is often used, especially in formal and scientific writing. Example: It is (always) stressed that...

Chinese. Example: People (always) stress that...	
--	--

5. How did Chinese characters originate? Is there another language that has a similar origination for its written form?

Students should consider these points:

- The Chinese writing system is unique among languages of the world, most of which use alphabetic scripts. Instead of a few dozen letters, it has thousands of characters that represent morphemes and words.
- The first recognisable form of Chinese writing dates back 3,500 years, but many argue that its origins lie much deeper in the past. The Chinese language has evolved substantially over time but has retained its ancient core. This makes it one of the longest continuously used writing systems in the world.
- Writing in China is commonly recognised to have evolved from earlier non-linguistic symbolic systems. During the Late Neolithic Period (second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC), many symbols or pictograms started to be incised on pottery and jade pieces. They are thought to be family or clan emblems that identified the ownership or provenance of the pottery or jade pieces.
- These pictograms were not truly Chinese characters but bore some resemblance to the earliest Chinese characters. In at least one instance, an emblem, a bird with a solar symbol, continued to be used as a clan name on bronze artefacts in early Shang Dynasty. The prevalent thought is that at some point in time these symbols ceased to represent the objects they illustrated but instead became names of the objects. In other words, the symbols acquired linguistic values and became logograms. The exact time of this switch is unclear. Perhaps it had already happened when these symbols were incised onto the pottery pieces. This means that what appeared on these artefacts was already writing. Experts who study the origins of Chinese characters have had no way to prove any of these hypotheses. At best, it can be said the symbols were precursors to Chinese writing.
- You may show your class an example from this image:



Syaoran~commonswiki, commons.wikimedia.org, CC BY-SA 3.0

6. Internet Search

What is a loanword? Find and write down 10 loanwords found in the Chinese language and 10 loanwords found in the English language.

Loan words from Chinese to English:

Chinese	English	Literal meaning
白菜	Bok choy	White vegetable
盆栽	Bonsai	Bowl plant
苦力	Coolie	Bitter power
番茄酱	Ketchup	Tomato sauce
茶	Tea	Tea

丝绸	Silk	Silk
豆腐	Tofu	Beancurd
镬	Wok	Cauldron
功夫	Kungfu	Martial arts
风水	Feng Shui	Wind and water

Loan words from English to Chinese:

English	Chinese
Bus	巴士
Cartoon	卡通
Cheese	芝士
Chocolate	巧克力
Coffee	咖啡
Disco	迪斯科
Golf	高尔夫
Guitar	吉他
Sandwich	三文治
Vitamin	维他命

## 7. Internet Search + Pair Work

With a partner, find out the key methods that were used to simplify Chinese characters from the traditional form to the simplified form. Share with your classmates what you have learnt.

Students should consider these points:

- Replacing the complicated element of a character with a simplified form: the simplified Chinese character still uses the same pattern as the traditional one.
  - The simpler substituted element is not a stand-alone character. Example: 單 → 单
  - The simpler substituted element is a stand-alone character and has a different sound from the traditional character. When it is substituted, its phonetic element becomes the phonetic of the traditional character. Example: 玉 (yù) becomes 国 (guó). This method is also known as changing the phonetic element. Example: 國 → 国
  - The simpler substituted element is a stand-alone character and has a same or similar sound as the traditional one. When it is substituted, its meaning is changed, such as when the meaning of 由 (yóu, cause) is changed to 邮 (yóu, post), Example: 郵 → 邮
- Retaining a part of the traditional character by removing unnecessary elements.  
Example: 電 → 电
- Reverting to an ancient form that is simpler than its modern one. Example: 淚 → 泪
- Merging two characters that sound the same or similar: first character + second character → merged character. Example: 麵 (miàn, noodle) + 面 (miàn, face) → 面 (miàn, noodle, face); 面条 (miàn, noodle), 面子 (miàn zi, face)
- Combining two complicated characters that sound the same or similar into a newly created and simpler one: first character + second character → combined character.

Example: 髮 (fà, hair) + 發 (fā, get rich or make a fortune) → 发 (fā); 假发 (jiǎ fà, wig), 发财 (fā cái, get rich or make a fortune)]

6. All characters that use the same element are simplified in the same way (systematically):
  - a) When the element is a stand-alone character but is not simplified. Example: 食 (shí, to eat, meal) → 食
  - b) When the element is a stand-alone character and is also simplified. Example: 馬 (mǎ, horse) → 马
  - c) When the element is part of a character and is simplified. Examples:
    - 食 → 饣 (shí, radical for characters that are associated with eating or food), 飯 → 饭 (fàn, rice), 餅 → 饼 (bǐng, biscuit, cookie), 饅 → 馒 (mán, as in 馒头, stuffed bun)
    - 驢 → 驴 (lǘ, donkey), 媽 → 妈 (mā, mother), 驛 → 驿 (yì, as in 驿站, rest station)
7. Using the cursive (handwritten) form as simplified printed Chinese character. Examples: 馬 → 马, 發 → 发, 農 → 农
8. Creating new radical-phonetic compounds: Traditional Chinese → Simplified Chinese (new radical + new phonetic). Examples:
  - 驚 (jīng, surprise) → 惊 (jīng) [忄 (xīn, heart) + 京 (jīng, short for Beijing)]
  - 膚 (fū, skin) → 肤 (fū) [月 (yuè, moon) + 夫 (fū, husband)]
  - 護 (hù, protect) → 护 (hù) [扌 (shǒu, hand) + 户 (hù, door)]
9. Creating new radical-radical compounds: Traditional Chinese → Simplified Chinese (new radical + new radical). Examples:
  - 塵 (chén, dust) → 尘 (chén) [小 (xiǎo, small) + 土 (tǔ, land)]
  - 竈 (zào, kitchen range) → 灶 (zào) [火 (huǒ, fire) + 土 (tǔ, land)]
  - 體 (tǐ, body) → 体 (tǐ) [亻 (rén, people) + 本 (běn, book)]

## 8. Internet Search + Pair Work

What is a homophone? We have learnt how homophony is used in the Chinese language. With a partner, find out a few more homophones in each of the categories below.

Students should consider these points:

- A homophone is a word that has the same or a similar pronunciation as another word but has a different meaning. Example: heir and air.
- A homophone also refers to a written element that represents the same spoken unit as another. Example: ks is a homophone of x in English

Category	Examples
Customs of festivals	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 年年有余: To have surpluses every year.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homophonous with 年年有鱼 (there will be fish every year)</li> <li>• Eating fish during Chinese New Year signifies prosperity for the coming year</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. 福到了: Fortune has arrived.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 到 (has arrived) is homophonous with 倒 (turned upside down), so Chinese New Year decorations with the character 福 on them are usually turned upside down to signify good fortune arriving with the new year.</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. 团圆: Reunion.</li> </ol>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sounds similar to 汤圆, which is a sweet dumpling customarily eaten during the Lantern Festival, which falls on the last day of Chinese New Year.</li> <li>• The spherical shape of the dumplings and the round bowls they are served in symbolise unity and the reunion of family members.</li> </ul> <p>4. 年年高升: To reach higher every year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 年高 is homophonous with 年糕 (glutinous rice cake).</li> <li>• 年糕 is a popular dish eaten during Chinese New Year in Southern China.</li> </ul>
Text-messages and Internet Chat	<p>1. 54 (wǔ sì): To ignore. Example: 我 54 你</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homophonous with 无视 (wú shì)</li> </ul> <p>2. 4242 (sì èr sì èr): a cute way of saying “yes”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homophonous with 是啊是啊 (shì ā shì ā)</li> </ul>
Gifts	<p>People avoid giving gifts in fours, as the Chinese character for the number 4, 四 (sì), sounds similar to that for “to die”, 死 (sǐ).</p>
Others	<p>向钱看: To look for the money.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homophonous with 向前看 (to look forward to the future), a slogan vigorously promoted by the Chinese government after the Cultural Revolution to exhort its citizens to work towards a common destiny.</li> <li>• This pun is sometimes explained as a swipe at the relentless pursuit of capitalism.</li> </ul>

Note: All URLs listed herein were ascertained to be accessible on 10 September, 2020.