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# Ten Basic Grammar Hurdles for Mandarin Chinese Speakers: A Contrastive Guide for the Beginning Teacher of Adult Mandarin Chinese EFL Students

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Ten Basic Grammar Hurdles for  
Mandarin Chinese Speakers:  
A Contrastive Guide for the Beginning Teacher of  
Adult Mandarin Chinese EFL Students

Mark Anthony Steele

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Master of Arts in Teaching degree at the  
School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont

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This project by Mark Anthony Steele is accepted in its present form.

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## Abstract

This handbook is written specifically for EFL teachers of Mandarin Chinese speaking students at the high elementary and intermediate levels of study. It is intended, through contrastive analysis, to provide the teacher with:

- a) an understanding of why these students have particular difficulty with certain structures and sentence patterns in English;
- b) a tool in predicting what ten of these patterns are; and
- c) strategies and activities for use in the classroom that will help the student overcome these ten hurdles in learning English.

The plan of this handbook rests on the belief that the more we as teachers understand of our students' native language, the easier it will be to understand and deal with their problems in learning the target language, English. And more importantly, student recognition of the differences between their L1 and English will make easier the task of mastering this new code of expression.

The ten items covered in this handbook are as follows: subject-verb agreement, pluralization, a, an, and the, subject-object pronouns, affirmative and interrogative statements with is, am, and are, negation with is, am and are, word order in simple sentences, prepositions in, on, and at, wh-questions, and word order in addresses.

## ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center) Descriptors

Languages  
Language Teachers  
Language Typology  
Second Languages  
Second Language Instruction  
Second Language Learning  
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Teaching Guides

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## Introduction

### Aims

This handbook is written specifically for EFL teachers of Mandarin Chinese speaking students at the high elementary and intermediate levels of study. It is intended, through contrastive analysis, to provide the teacher with:

- a) An understanding of why these students have particular difficulty with certain structures and sentence patterns in English;
- b) a tool in predicting what ten of these patterns are; and
- c) strategies and activities for use in the classroom that will help the student overcome these ten hurdles in learning English.

The plan of this handbook rests on the belief that the more we as teachers understand of our students' native language, the easier it will be to understand and deal with their problems in learning the target language, English. An more importantly, student recognition of the differences between their L1 and English will make easier the task of mastering this new code of expression.

### Content

The ten elements of English syntax and grammar chosen for this handbook are intended to provide a partial answer to a question I asked of myself and several fellow EFL teachers in Taipei, "Are there certain structures that our students consistently find difficult to master and, if so, what are

they?" After considering over twenty-five possible items, I have narrowed the list to those I feel are the most troublesome as a result of the differences between English and Chinese grammar. These include subject-verb agreement, pluralization, articles a, an, and the, subject-object pronouns, affirmative and interrogative statements with is, am, and are, negation with is, am, and are, word order in simple sentences, prepositions in, on, and at, wh- questions, and word order in addresses.

The order in which these structures appear in the handbook is arbitrary, and the teacher is encouraged not only to choose the appropriate lessons, but also to adapt each lesson to the learning needs of his/her students.

#### Organization of Lessons

Each lesson contains three parts, based on a system of Analysis, Activities, and Review and Practice:

- I. Analysis. A brief and simple contrastive analysis of how the focus of the lesson is different in English and Mandarin Chinese, including examples.
- II. Activities. Strategies and activities the teacher can employ to help the students grasp what they need to master.
- III. Review and Practice. Activities to practice and reinforce correct English usage.

My overriding criterion in structuring the above format is its in-class value to both teacher and student. Consequently, I have tried to limit the theoretical discussion of each structure in favor of examples. The first section of each lesson is designed to focus teacher and student attention on the distinctive features of English expression as opposed to that of Mandarin. This is followed by examples which illustrate (through underlining) the key distinctive elements in English. Because many teachers have little or no knowledge of either Mandarin characters or romanization, examples of Mandarin sentence structure and patterns appear in English. It is suggested that the teacher put these and other examples on the board at the beginning of each lesson to help students visualize the contrastive elements in both languages.

The second section of each lesson presents activities that engage the student in learning the English pattern focused upon in the lesson. The activities are for the most part communicative exercises that require active student participation and generation of their own English sentences. It is recommended that the teacher discourage any use of Mandarin in these and the subsequent review activities, as the student's attention at this point should be solely on the English usage.



The third section of each lesson contains activities designed to practice and reinforce what was learned in the first two parts of the lesson. These activities are an essential follow-up to the prior exercises in the lesson, and are meant to provide both in-class and at home review for the students.

#### A Final Note

It is important that the teacher recognize the supplemental nature of these lessons. The material contained herein is the result of a limited application of contrastive analysis and thus is obviously not intended to be a comprehensive look at the grammatical differences between English and Mandarin Chinese. In addition, although I hope it is incorporated into curricula, syllabi, and teacher training materials, it is certainly not a substitute for any of these.

## Lesson 1: Subject-Verb Agreement

### I. Analysis

The focus of this lesson is the seemingly universal problem of Chinese students in applying subject-verb agreement, especially in the simple present tense. Mandarin uses only one verb form regardless of the subject pronoun, while English uses two forms, depending on which subject pronoun precedes it. This contrast is illustrated through the following examples:

<u>Mandarin</u>	<u>English</u>
"I walk"	I walk
"You walk"	You walk
"We walk"	We walk
"They walk"	They walk
"He walk"	He <u>walks</u>
"She walk"	She <u>walks</u>
"It walk"	It <u>walks</u>

To change the above statements into questions, Mandarin simply adds the particle ma to the end of the statement, whereas English requires the use of either Do or Does, depending on the pronoun that follows it.

Examples:

<u>Mandarin</u>	<u>English</u>
"I smile (ma)?"	<u>Do</u> I smile?
"You smile (ma)?"	<u>Do</u> you smile?
"We walk (ma)?"	<u>Do</u> we walk?
"They walk (ma)?"	<u>Do</u> they walk?
"He understand (ma)?"	<u>Does</u> he understand?
"She understand (ma)?"	<u>Does</u> she understand?
"It understand (ma)?"	<u>Does</u> it understand?

## II. Activities

### A. Team Verbs

Team verbs create eight columns on the board with one following pronouns at the top of each column: We, Chen, Chen and Mary, You, They, The dog, I, The girl. The class is then divided into two teams. The teacher begins by calling a student from team A to the board, and then giving the student a verb. The student must first write the verb on the board in the form stated by the teacher, then write the appropriate form of the verb in each column. When the first student is finished she calls a student from team B up to the board and gives that student another verb. That student repeats the process, and so on until all members of each team have had a turn. A team gets 1 point for each correct verb form in a column, but minus 1 for each incorrect answer. Teams may help their member at the board by calling out the correct answers after the student has completed all eight columns, but not before. This gives the teacher and the students an idea of which forms they need to work on.

Variation: If column headings become too repetitive, add the requirement that each student in turn must change the column headings.

B. Chain Story

Students can remain in their seat for this activity, which is a variation of the "chain story" technique.

Tell the students to imagine that they all own a farm or ranch together, and each one has a job to do every day. The activity begins with the first student stating, in a complete sentence, what his job is. Example: I milk cows. Or I grow potatoes. The next student must remember and report what the first student does, and then state what he (the next student) does. This continues around the class until all students have had a chance. The students must write down everyone's response during the game, using the correct verb form in the present tense. The student who records the most responses correctly is appointed director of the farm, chief pig feeder, or whatever the class deems appropriate.

III. Review and Practice

A. Handout

Pair the students and have them complete the following handout together. They should then prepare a similar, third person account of each other's daily routine. Some or all of these should be selected for oral presentation to the class.

Handout 1: Subject-Verb Agreement

Fill in the blanks below to complete Lin's daily routine. Use the verbs listed. You may also have to think of your own word(s) to use in some spaces.

watch    stay    call    brush    eat  
listen    ask    take    decide

Hello, my name is Lin. Everyone \_\_\_\_\_ I have an exciting life. Well, you \_\_\_\_\_. I \_\_\_\_\_ every morning at 10:00, but I always \_\_\_\_\_ in bed until 11:00 a.m. Then I \_\_\_\_\_ my teeth and \_\_\_\_\_ a shower. At 12:00 I \_\_\_\_\_ breakfast and lunch at the same time. In the afternoon I \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ my tired body. Sometimes I \_\_\_\_\_ my girlfriend and \_\_\_\_\_ her to \_\_\_\_\_ to my house and \_\_\_\_\_ my dinner. She \_\_\_\_\_ I'm a lazy guy. Anyway, at 5:00 I usually \_\_\_\_\_ a nap until 7:00, and then I \_\_\_\_\_ dinner. After dinner I \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ T.V. This often \_\_\_\_\_ me hungry, so sometimes I prepare a snack at 9:00. Then I \_\_\_\_\_ to music. Finally, after a hard day, I \_\_\_\_\_ to bed.

## Lesson 2: Pluralization

### I. Analysis

Many languages, including English, indicate pluralization by using a different form from the singular, i.e., man-men, teacher-teachers, porch-porches. Mandarin nouns, however, in most cases show no specific number distinction. Plurality is expressed in Mandarin through the use of quantity expressions equivalent to "some," "many," and "all." Both languages mark plurality in personal pronouns, although the form is different. Mandarin attaches a suffix to the pronoun, while English uses a different word (except "you," which is the same in both singular and plural forms).

The following examples illustrate the difficulty many students have in mastering English pluralization:

#### Mandarin

S: "I is student."  
Pl: "I (suffix)  
is student."  
  
S: "She is teacher."  
Pl: "She (suffix)  
is teacher."  
  
S: "You is worker."  
Pl: "You (suffix)  
is worker."

#### English

I am student.  
We are students.  
  
She is a teacher.  
They are teachers.  
  
You are a worker.  
You are workers.

While English uses different words to pluralize demonstrative determiners (this and that becomes these

and those), Mandarin again simply adds a suffix.

Consider these examples:

<u>Mandarin</u>	<u>English</u>
S: "This is magazine"	This is a magazine.
P1: "This (suffix) is magazine."	<u>These</u> are magazines.
S: "That is house."	That is a house.
P1: "That (suffix) is house."	<u>Those</u> are houses.

Note: You may at this time wish to review the meaning of these and those, i.e., these is used to refer to objects close at hand, those for objects farther away from the speaker.

## II. Activities

### A. Object Description

Before class gather together various small items such as pens, pencils, erasers, books, cigarettes, rods, etc. It is important that there be as many different items as possible, including several of each type. Tell the students to form a semi-circle and place the items in groups of one or more on a table in front of them. Each student in turn must come to the table and describe each group of items as thoroughly as possible. When the first student is finished describing all groups on the table, she then reorganizes the groups into any number she

wants and chooses another student to come up and repeat the procedure.

Example: Mary comes to the table and begins describing each group: These are 3 pencils, or These are 3 yellow pencils; That is 1 white book; Those are 5 pens; That is one big rock, etc.

An effective and fun method of reinforcing correct usage is to tape record each student's description and then play it back to the class at the end of his/her turn. Mistakes can be corrected at this time by the class as a whole, or by the student.

B. Student Generated Sentences

Prepare a list of singular nouns, at least as many as there are students in the class. Divide the class into two teams, one being the "singular" team, the other being the "plural" team. The teacher begins by calling out a word. One student from each team must first write their team's version of the word, and then write a complete sentence containing that word. Each team gets half a point for writing the correct word, and half a point for writing a complete, correct sentence. The team with the most points wins.



### III. Review and Practice

#### A. Interviewing

Students will interview another member of the class concerning what that student likes and doesn't like, buys and doesn't buy, eats and doesn't eat, etc. Before assigning this activity, gather together as many small pieces of paper as there are members of the class. On each slip of paper write a variation of the following: Ask Susan to tell you the things she likes to buy; Ask Zhen to tell you all the foods he likes to eat; Ask William what he likes to cook; Ask Ching to tell you all the things she likes to drink. Each student picks one piece of paper and follows the instructions. All students must in turn interview and be interviewed. Lists can be written on the board and/or read to the class.

#### B. Picture Description

Before class prepare a number of pictures which contain groups of fruit, vegetables, or assorted other small items. These can be drawn or cut out of magazines, but there should be at least one for every two students in the class. Group the students into pairs. One student in each pair gets a picture, and without allowing the other student to see the picture, describes the contents. The other

student must first write down his partner's description, and then draw a corresponding picture. After the first round the pairs exchange pictures, and the other student gets to listen and draw. After each round the students will compare descriptions and accuracy of the drawing.

Variation: Divide the class into two teams. Each team spends a few minutes writing a description of a picture. Before they write, one member of each team is sent to the board. When the description is completed the groups dictate their description to their team member and he/she draws the corresponding picture. The most accurate description and resulting picture wins.

### Lesson 3: A, An, The

#### I. Analysis

Mastering the use of the English articles a, an, and the is often difficult for Chinese speakers because Mandarin does not have equivalent words. Instead, the definite or indefinite nature of a noun phrase is determined by its context, grammar, or the use of other types of determiners such as the Mandarin equivalents of "one" and "that." Consider these examples:

<u>Mandarin</u>	<u>English</u>
"She is doctor."	She is <u>a</u> doctor.
"She is old doctor."	She is <u>an</u> old doctor.
"I want to eat sandwich."	I want to eat <u>a</u> sandwich.
"Please give me one cup coffee and one donut."	Please give me <u>a</u> cup of coffee and <u>a</u> donut.
*"Rice is delicious."	<u>The</u> rice is delicious.
"World is flat."	<u>The</u> world is flat.
"I went store."	I went to <u>the</u> store.
"He is robber."	He is <u>the</u> robber.
"My friend have flu."	My friend has <u>the</u> flu.
"This machine broken."	<u>The</u> machine is broken.

\*The context of the speech situation dictates the general or specific meaning of rice, but the above sentence is correct in both cases.

As you can see from the examples listed above, Mandarin students have certain difficulties in learning a, an,

and the that students with other native languages may not have. But virtually all EFL students must at some point in their learning grapple with the intricacies and contradictions of English articles. Although they are often the first words learned, they can also be the most difficult to master. The supplement on page 18 is meant to provide teachers with a handy reference guide in their teaching of a, an, and the.

## II. Activities

### A. Room Description

Explain to the class that you want them to write a description of a room in their home, including all of the items in the room. Give the students a few minutes to choose a room and consider its contents. Then they should begin writing. Since the purpose of this activity is to practice the articles a, an, and the, all sentences should contain at least two articles. Depending on how advanced the class is, you may choose to require that they write in paragraph form or simply construct a series of sentences. Encourage the class to be as creative and thorough as possible in their descriptions. Instead of stating that "there is a picture on the wall," for example, ask the students to describe

both the picture and the wall in detail, using color, size, etc. When the descriptions are complete, the students should then read them to the class.

Variation: Ask the students to describe a room in their home without naming any object, only giving a description of it. When all are complete they should be read to the class and the class must guess which room is being described. This variation requires that students be as thorough in their descriptions as possible.

B. Chain Responses

This is a chain response activity in which students must respond as quickly and accurately as possible. The class forms a circle either standing up or with their desks. The teacher chooses one student to go first and then calls out an article. The first student must use that article to begin a complete sentence. When the student has stated the sentence, she then calls out another article to be used by the next student in a complete sentence, and so on. This continues until the circle is complete. Then round two begins, but this time students must make a complete sentence with the article in the middle of

the sentence. Sentences can be connected by meaning (to form a story) or not, but the focus should be on accurate use of the articles.

### III. Review and Practice

#### A. Describing a Country

Ask each student to research a country of their choice and write a description of that country's major points of interest, including rivers, lakes, mountain ranges and peaks, major cities, language(s), etc. As in the activities listed above, the focus is of course on the use of articles. Depending on how advanced the students are, you may require them to write in paragraph or single sentence form.

Note: It is recommended that each student receive a copy of the attached rules governing the use of a, an, and the in English.

Supplement: A, An, The

1. A and AN are indefinite articles. They are used before singular, count nouns: a book, a man, an apple, etc.
2. A and AN are used to introduce a singular, count noun into a conversation for the first time. After it has been introduced and both the speaker and listener are thinking of the same item, THE is used in place of A and AN.
3. AN is used before words that begin with a vowel or a vowel sound: an apron, an envelope, an honor, an x-ray, etc.
4. THE is a definite article. It is used in a conversation after an item has been introduced, and when both the speaker and the listener are thinking about the same thing.
5. THE is used to refer to a specific item among several.
6. THE is used with the names of oceans and rivers, but not with lakes: The Atlantic Ocean, The Columbia River, etc.
7. THE is used with the names of mountain chains, but not with the names of specific mountains: The Rocky Mountains, Mount Rainier.
8. THE is used with the official names of countries, but not with unofficial names: The United States of America

(America), The United Kingdom (Britain), The Republic of Ireland (Ireland), etc.

9. THE is used with dates that are written out in full:  
the twenty-fifth of December, the first of August, the nineteenth of May, etc.
10. THE is not used with the names of persons, languages, streets, or the time of day.



## Lesson 4: Subject-Object Pronouns

### I. Analysis

Few areas of English grammar pose as much of a headache to Chinese students as does that of subject-object pronouns, because Mandarin requires no such form change in its sentence structure. Whereas English pronouns change according to their subject or object position in a sentence and thus are numerous and specific in their use, Mandarin pronouns are few in number and can be used appropriately in either position in a sentence. Consider the following contrastive elements and examples:

#### Mandarin

<u>S</u>	<u>O</u>
I/we	I/we
you	you
he/she/it	he/she/it
they	they

#### English

<u>S</u>	<u>O</u>
I/we	<u>me/us</u>
you	you
he/she/it	<u>him/her/it</u>
they	<u>them</u>

#### Examples:

"I gave he my watch."

I gave him my watch.

"He helped she write the letter."

He helped her write the letter.

"They like we but they don't like they."

They like us but they don't like them.

"Please help I."

Please help me.

It should be noted that since the English object pronoun forms seem to create the most problems for students, the focus of lessons and activities should concentrate on

contrasting both subject and object forms in complete sentences rather than analyzing each form in isolation.

The following guidelines may help students to distinguish between the subject and object pronoun form:

- Object pronouns often come at the end of a sentence,
- while subject pronouns come at the beginning of a sentence.
- Object pronouns are used after prepositions such as: with, to, from, for, etc.

## II. Activities

### A. Pair Acting

This activity will get the students up and moving around while at the same time practicing subject-object pronouns. Divide students up into groups of four, and then into pairs, so each group has two pairs. Give each pair a list of ten actions they will perform together, such as walking, talking, drawing, writing, etc. Pairs take turns alternately performing their actions and describing the other pair's actions. Students must use object and subject forms of personal pronouns. Example: He is walking with her; She is talking to him; They are painting a picture; She helped her; They sang to us.

B. Picture Description

This is a similar activity that uses pictures instead of students performing actions.

Cut out as many pictures as you can find involving two or more people doing something together.

Explain to the class that as you hold up each picture they must write down a one sentence description of the picture using only subject and object pronouns to describe the people and what they are doing. Example: He is opening the door for her, not The man is opening the door for the woman.

When all the students have finished writing their one sentence description, call on a few to read their sentences, and then go on to the next picture.

C. Question and Answer

In this exercise the students take turns asking and responding to each other's questions, using subject-object pronouns.

Ask each student to write down five questions that contain only personal pronouns. Example: Is Chen watching T.V. with Lin? Did John help Mei study? Is the teacher with the students? Did Paul write Shao a letter? Each student then takes a turn

standing in front of the class and calling on individual students to answer his questions. The student who is called upon must answer the question substituting subject and object pronouns for the personal pronouns in the question. Examples: Yes, he is watching T.V. with him; No, he didn't write her a letter, etc.

### III. Review and Practice

#### A. Dialog Creation

Pair up students and have them create dialogs such as the following one, which accent both subject and object forms of pronouns. They can then act them out, or read them aloud to the class.

A. Excuse me. Are you Fred's friend, or are you Frank's friend?

B. Well, I know them both, but we really aren't friends yet. Do I know you?

A. Yes, we are old friends. We met at a party for Fred and Frank.

B. Frankly, I don't remember you, but I remember them, and I remember the party we had for them, too. We all had a wonderful time.

- A. Yes, we did. And they did too, especially Fred. He sang, and he danced, and he certainly ate a lot. You danced with him, didn't you?
- B. Yes, that's how I remember him. He stepped on my feet. They still hurt.

Lesson 5: Affirmative and Interrogative  
Statements with Is, Am, Are

I. Analysis

The copula "be" in English presents Mandarin students with a difficulty similar to that of mastering English subject-verb agreement, namely, that English simply has more forms to deal with. While Mandarin uses only one form regardless of the subject pronoun that precedes it, English has three: is, am, and are. Another complicating factor is that while the Mandarin copula remains the same in the past tense, English uses two additional forms: was and were. These contrasts are illustrated in the following examples:

<u>Mandarin</u>	<u>English</u>
Noun Phrase	
"I is lawyer."	I <u>am</u> a lawyer.
"He is teacher."	He <u>is</u> a teacher.
"She is teacher."	She <u>is</u> a teacher.
"We is student."	We <u>are</u> students.
"They is student."	They <u>are</u> students.
"You is student."	You <u>are</u> a student.
"You (plural suffix) is student."	You <u>are</u> students.

While context and adverbs of time signal the past tense in Mandarin, English also changes its verb forms.

"Last year I is nurse." (Adverb signals tense)	Last year I <u>was</u> a nurse.
"She is girl." (Context signals tense)	She <u>was</u> a girl.

## Adjective Phrase

Most adjective phrases in Mandarin do not use the copula, but there are a few that do require it:

<u>Mandarin</u>	<u>English</u>
"That house is blue."	That house <u>is</u> blue.
"That tea is hot."	That tea <u>is</u> hot.
"That soup both is sweet."	Those soups <u>are</u> sweet.

As can be seen from the above examples, most of the confusion for Mandarin students lies in the use of is, am, and are in the English noun phrase. Once this is mastered, students usually have little or no trouble using these forms in verb, adjective, and adverbial phrases.

Interrogative (Question) Forms  
Noun Phrases

<u>Mandarin</u>	<u>English</u>
"You is student (ma)?"	<u>Are</u> you a student?
"You (plural suffix) is student (ma)?"	<u>Are</u> you students?
"They is student (ma)?"	<u>Are</u> they students?
"We is student (ma)?"	<u>Are</u> we students?
"She is teacher (ma)?"	<u>Is</u> she a teacher?
"He is teacher (ma)?"	<u>Is</u> he a teacher?
"I is criminal (ma)?"	<u>Am</u> I a criminal?

It is easy to see from the above examples that Mandarin students find difficulty in the variation of form from English statements to questions, both of which use is, am, and are, but in different positions. As a result, students need extensive practice generating both statements and questions.

## II. Activities

### A. Famous Person Role-Playing

This activity will allow students to practice is, am, and are in both statements and questions.

Tell the students that during this activity they will assume the identity of a famous person, and allow them a few minutes to decide who they will be. Then ask them to write a third person, one- or two-paragraph description of the person they have chosen. When the students have finished writing they then assume the character of the famous person and are interviewed by the rest of the class concerning the identity of their character. It is a good idea to limit the questioning of each student to about five minutes, and all questions should be short and must contain either is, am, or are. The student who guesses correctly then takes her place in front of the class.



B. Wh- Chain Questions

The students can remain in their seats for this exercise, which requires quick but accurate questions and responses.

The first student begins by making a statement such as I am a pilot, then follows with a question like Who am I? or Who are you? or Who is he? (pointing to another student). The next student in the row or in the circle then must respond by answering the question, and following it with another question of the third student, and so on. Some sample questions and responses are as follows:

Student A: They are students. Who am I?

Student B: You are a clown. What is he?

Student C: He is a Chinese. What are you?

Student D: I am an egg. Who am I?

etc.

The exercise continues until all students have had a chance to question and respond.

Variation: Students form a circle and follow the same pattern as above, except that when a student makes a mistake he must drop out. The game

continues until there is only one student left, the winner!

### III. Review and Practice

#### A. Interviewing

Students will interview another member of the class about his/her personality, likes and dislikes, family members, daily routine, etc. Interview should be conducted in second and third person, and students should then prepare a report to the class in the first and third person. The teacher may need to provide categories and example questions to guide students in interviewing each other. The focus of course should be on the use of is, am, and are.

## Lesson 6: Negation with Is, Am, Are

### I. Analysis

Once Mandarin students have conquered is, am, and are, and their use in a sentence, the chief remaining difficulty for them is often uncertainty about where to place not. In Mandarin, negation occurs before the copula, while in English it follows is, am, and are, and the past forms was and were. Another common problem for Mandarin students is the contracted form, i.e., isn't, weren't, etc., which has no Mandarin counterpart.

Examine the following examples:

<u>Mandarin</u>	<u>English</u>
"I not is a student."	I <u>am not</u> a student.
"You not is Santa Claus."	You <u>are not (aren't)</u> Santa Claus.
"They not is teachers."	They <u>are not (aren't)</u> teachers.
"He not is Chen."	He <u>is not (isn't)</u> Chen.
"We not is good students."	We <u>are not (aren't)</u> good students.
"That not is green door."	That <u>is not (isn't)</u> a green door.

Keep in mind that negation of the copula in English questions is almost always in the form of a contraction, and the word order changes:

<u>Mandarin</u>	<u>English</u>
"That not is mine (ma)?"	<u>Isn't</u> that mine?
"That not is typewriter (ma)?"	<u>Isn't</u> that a typewriter?
"You not is my friend (ma)?"	<u>Aren't</u> you my friend?
"Your brother not is doctor (ma)?"	<u>Isn't</u> your brother a doctor?
"They not is teachers (ma)?"	<u>Weren't</u> they teachers?
"I not is wonderful (ma)?"	<u>Wasn't</u> I wonderful?

Students should note that there is no contraction of not with am, and while British speakers often choose to use the pattern Am I not in questions, most Americans simply use Aren't and the past form Wasn't.

## II. Activities

### A. Tic-Tac-No

This activity is called Tic-Tac-No and involves extensive questioning and answering by students. Before class prepare half as many blank envelopes as there are students in the class. Ask the class to pair up and give each pair an envelope. Each pair then must write five questions, each on separate slips of paper. These are placed in the envelope, and the pair then repeats the process except this time they must write five answers to imaginary

questions, not to the questions they wrote previously. (A student who chooses a question or an answer from the envelope must then make up a question or answer to match the slip of paper he chose.) When each pair has stuffed their envelope with five question slips and five answer slips, they then exchange envelopes with another pair. All questions and answers must contain is, am, are, was, or were, and be designed to elicit a negative response that includes one of the above words together with not (or in a contraction).

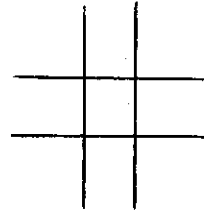
When envelopes have been exchanged each pair should draw a tic-tac-toe grid, and then the game begins. Both students take turns drawing a slip from the envelope and responding with a question or an answer. If he is correct he may put an "x" or an "o" anywhere he chooses on the grid, and then it is another player's turn. Play continues until one player wins. Envelopes are then exchanged with another team and another game is played. The activity continues until time or envelopes run out.

Variation: Players as well as envelopes may move from pair to pair after each round. This gives the

students a greater opportunity to interact with all members of the class.

Example:

Tic-Tac-Toe/Tic-Tac-No Grid:



### III. Review and Practice

#### A. Picture Cut-Outs

The following activity can be started in class or at home, and continued the following day in class.

Ask the students to go through old magazines and cut out pictures of people engaged in different activities. They should select ten of these and write a positive and a negative statement and a positive and a negative question for each picture. These can be attached to the picture or written on a separate piece of paper, but all must contain a copula in either standard or contracted form. When they have finished ask several students to present the pictures and captions to the class, and then have students exchange pictures and create new captions for different pictures.

## Lesson 7: Word Order in Simple Sentences

### I. Analysis

Most languages of the world fall into one of four basic categories of sentence structure: subject-verb-object (SVO), subject-object-verb (SOV), verb-subject-object (VSO), and those languages with an indefinite word order. While English is easily classified as being primarily subject-verb-object, Mandarin falls into the last category -- no consistent word order. One important reason for this is that in Mandarin, considerations of context play a more important role in determining how a sentence is expressed than do rules of syntax. Thus Mandarin speakers are accustomed to stating ideas in many different ways, and often find it difficult adapting to the more rigid SVO pattern of English. This is significant for teachers of elementary and low-intermediate level students because a great deal of attention needs to be given to establishing the SVO word order, especially the placing of the verb between the subject and object in a sentence. For the purpose of contrastive analysis, most linguists use subject-verb-object and subject-object-verb patterns to describe Mandarin, since both are commonly used, and the same is done here. Examine the following examples:

Mandarin

SOV: "She to library went."  
 SVO: "She went library."

SOV: "I at university study."  
 SVO: "I study university."

SOV: "He at Far East  
 department store buy  
 something."  
 SVO: "He buy something at  
 Far East department  
 store."

English

SVO: She went to  
 S V  
the library.  
 O

SVO: I study at  
 S V  
the university.  
 O

SVO: He bought it at  
 S V O  
 Far East depart-  
 ment store

The above analysis and examples are those of simple sentences. Complex sentences in both Mandarin and English carry with them more complex structures, but mastery of the English SVO pattern is an essential prerequisite to more advanced levels of study.

## II. Activities

### A. Group Sentences

In this activity students must create group sentences and then identify the subject, verb, and object parts of the sentence.

Organize the class into three groups or teams. If the class wants to keep score, create three scoring columns on the board. To start the game have one student from each team come up to the front of the



class. After they have arrived and are ready, assign each a part of a sentence, either subject, verb, or object. Each then has five seconds or so to state a word or group of words that represent their category, with subject going first, verb next, etc. When they have finished the class repeats what they have said collectively. If it makes a complete, correct sentence each team gets a point. If one part is wrong the class must identify the mistake and that player's team gets no point. Another group of three students then comes up and repeats the process. The teacher should make sure that different teams are given different categories each turn, so they cannot prepare prior to their turn. The following is an example of how the game is played:

1st student: My word is a subject. The word is people.

2nd student: My word is a verb. The word is have.

3rd student: My word is an object. The word is money.

As the game progresses and the students get comfortable, assign subject, object, and verb phrases to make the game more challenging.

B. Chain Sentences

This activity is a variation of the chain story, in which one student's sentence generates the next student's sentence, and so on. Students should be seated in a circle. One student is chosen to begin, and she must give the class a sentence with a subject, verb, and object. The sentence may contain more than one of the above and also may have several modifiers. The next student must use the object of the last sentence as the subject of his sentence, and this continues around the class. After saying her sentence, each student must identify the subject, verb, and object of the sentence. Example:

1st student: We have too much homework.

2nd student: Homework is a wonderful thing.

3rd student: The thing ate New York.

4th student: New York is a big city.

etc.

III. Review and Practice

A. Questions and Answers

Each student must think of five questions that will elicit a subject-verb-object response. Example: Is your friend a rich man? The student then must ask another student in the class the questions and write

down the answers. If the response does not follow the pattern the question must be rewritten and asked again. When the five questions have been asked and answered, students should identify the subject, verb, and object in the sentence and some or all can be read to the class.

B. Story Questions

Assign a story to be read or read a story as a group in class. Students then either orally or in writing ask and answer questions from the story. Each question and answer must contain the subject-verb-object pattern.

## Lesson 8: Wh- Questions

### I. Analysis

The question word questions or wh- questions, as they are often called in English, are constructions that contain a word which usually requires a specific kind of response from the listener. In English they are easy to identify because most begin with the letters wh, and are most often used at the beginning of a question clause or sentence. They can be adjectives such as which or what when used as part of a noun phrase, i.e., What cigarette do you smoke? Which one do you prefer? Or, the same words can be used as pronouns, as in the following sentences: What is this? Which is this? The meaning differs greatly in the latter two sentences even though both are used the same grammatically. Mandarin EFL students often have difficulty with these and other wh- question words because of their similarities in spelling and their cross use from one grammar form to another. EFL teachers, on the other hand, just as often feel that the above features of wh- words make them inherently easier to learn. An added problem for Mandarin students is that Mandarin is far more flexible in its use of question words, allowing them to occur sometimes at the beginning, sometimes in the middle, and often at the end of the sentence. Examine the following examples:

<u>Mandarin</u>	<u>English</u>
"You go where?"	<u>Where</u> are you going?
"You <u>or</u> where go?"	
"You want what?"	<u>What</u> do you want?
"Why he cry?"	<u>Why</u> is he crying?
"He <u>or</u> why cry?"	
"He <u>or</u> cry why?"	

As indicated by the above analysis and examples, the challenge for Mandarin students is in recognizing that wh- words sometimes have different grammatical functions depending on the question, and that they have a fixed position in simple sentences in English (more complex question forms should be dealt with at a more advanced level).

The activities that follow are designed to help students become more comfortable with the use of wh- words in questions.

## II. Activities

### A. Wh- Word Hunt

The purpose of this activity is to familiarize students with the seven wh- words and the information they elicit.

Choose an article or an excerpt from a short story at the student's level of reading ability that contains several wh- words. Arrange the students in pairs and give each pair a copy of the reading. Tell them to first go through and underline all wh- words (including how) that they can find. They should then read the story together and identify the following:

Who the main characters are;

What the subject is;

When the events in the reading occurred  
-- in the past, present, or future,  
and any specific times mentioned;

Where the events took place, or are  
taking place;

Why the events are taking place, and  
why the characters are involved.

The teacher may want to give the students several examples prior to asking them to work on their own to insure their complete understanding of the task. Another option is to do a similar exercise together as a class before asking students to tackle it on their own. In either case, a full and comprehensive discussion should follow to make sure students can easily identify the wh- information in the reading.

### B. Information Gathering

In this activity the students must use the wh- words to obtain information from each other.

Before class the teacher should prepare tags with the names of famous people printed on them in large letters. There should be one tag for each member of the class. Have the students line up with their backs to you and stick a tag onto each student's back. Students should not know their new identity, but instead must roam the class asking each other only wh- questions to find out who they are. Of course, no Chinese is allowed!

## III. Review and Practice

### A. Cross-Fire

This activity is designed to be done in class. Organize the class into two teams sitting across from each other. Beginning at one end, a student must ask the student directly across from her a wh-question. That student must repeat the question and then respond with a grammatically correct answer. The next student, this time from team B, asks the question, and the team A student must repeat the question and then answer. This continues until all students have either asked or answered questions.

The teacher should keep score, giving points for correct questions and answers. The team making the least mistakes wins.



## Lesson 9: In, On, At

### I. Analysis

English has a much more complex system of prepositions than Mandarin does, and the English sentence is more dependent on its preposition than is the case in Mandarin. As a result, Mandarin speakers often have difficulty choosing the correct preposition and prepositional phrase to use in a sentence. This is particularly true in the case of the three primary locative prepositions: in, on, and at. Each carries with it a particular meaning in English, while Mandarin accomplishes the same function with just one preposition ("zai"). This contrast is illustrated in the following examples:

<u>Mandarin</u>	<u>English</u>
"He lives at Shing Yi Road."	He lives <u>on</u> Shing Yi Road.
"Telephone at table-top."	The telephone is <u>on</u> the table.
"He live at Taipei."	He lives <u>in</u> Taipei.
"She at bedroom."	She is <u>in</u> her bedroom.
"She at school study."	She studies <u>at</u> school.
"He at Taiwan University teaches."	He teaches <u>at</u> Taiwan University.

It should be noted that in addition to the above, both languages have more specific prepositions of location such as behind, beside, inside, outside, etc. While

these may be placed differently in a Mandarin sentence vis a vis English, the semantic function (meaning) is in most cases the same. As a result, the above type prepositions don't seem to present students with as much difficulty as do in, on, and at. Before doing the activities it is important that the students understand the distinct function of each one, and this can be achieved through a simple, contrastive explanation prior to or following the above examples.

## II. Activities

### A. Sentence Exchange

This activity will provide students with both verbal and written practice in using in, on, and at as prepositions of location. Explain to the students that the following sentence is a useful guide in determining when and where to use these prepositions:

Lin works in the coffee shop at the Ritz on Ming Chuen East Road.

Following this example, ask the students to construct a sentence that describes where they work. When they have finished writing tell them to memorize their sentence and then exchange it with another student. They should then memorize their

partner's sentence and deliver both to the class. Paraphrasing of each other's sentences is acceptable as long as the paraphrase contains all three prepositions.

B. Hear It and Draw It

This activity can be used to practice not only in, on, and at, but as many prepositions of place as your students can handle. It is also useful for introducing new prepositions and vocabulary. The first part of the activity is primarily concerned with listening and drawing. Each student should have a blank piece of paper and pen or pencils, preferably of different colors. All they have to do is draw the picture that you describe or dictate to them. An easy way to begin is to ask them to draw a big picture frame. Then begin to dictate objects they must put inside the frame to make the picture. You may want to follow a real picture that you have with you, or you can make it up as you go along. The point of course is to get the students to comprehend and follow your instructions as accurately as possible. Here are some sample instructions:

Draw a sky at the top.

Put some clouds in the sky.

Draw some rain under the clouds.

Draw grass on the ground at the bottom of the picture.

Draw two people standing on a hill in the grass, in the corner of the picture.

Etc.

When students have finished with this first picture, ask several (one at a time) to dictate one of their own to the class, or pair them up and have them dictate pictures to each other.

Note: Depending on which prepositions you feel the students need the most practice with, smaller pictures with more detail sometimes are even more effective, especially for the "artists" in the class.

### III. Review and Practice

#### A. Room Description

Ask the class to go home and write a detailed description of one of the rooms in their own house. Make sure the instructions are clear enough so they know they must describe the room, not draw it.

Details in the description should include all furniture, items on furniture, paintings and other

objects on walls, objects on the floor including carpeting, lighting, and lamps, etc.

Depending on how advanced they are you may want to place a limit of one page on the assignment, but ask them to bring it to class the next day and read it. The most important criteria is that they use in, on, and at as many times as possible in the course of their description.

## Lesson 10: Word Order in Addresses

### I. Analysis

Many students have remarked on the difficulty they have in learning the correct sequence of items in an address written in English. This difficulty seems to lie in the fact that the same address is expressed in almost opposite ways in Mandarin and English. The correct order for items in Mandarin is as follows: country, state, or province, city, street, lane, alley, number. English, however, uses the following sequence: number, street, lane, alley, city, state or province, country. Or, if the address was in the U.S., the order in most cases would simply be: number, street, (apartment number, if any), city, zip code, state, country. The examples below more clearly illustrate where the confusion comes from:

<u>Mandarin</u>	<u>English</u>
1. "Mr. U. R. Crazy Republic of China Taiwan Taipei Chung Shan North Road 15 Lane 36 Alley #150"	Mr. U. R. Crazy 150 Chung Shan North Road Lane 15 Alley 36 Taipei, Taiwan Republic of China

Sometimes a section of the city is also part of an address in a large city in China:

- |    |   |   |
|----|---|---|
| 2. | "Ms. I. C. You<br>Republic of China<br>Taiwan<br>Taipei<br>Hoping East Road<br>Section 2<br>55 Lane<br>17 Alley<br>#87" | Ms. I. C. You<br>87 Hoping East Road,<br>Sec. 2<br>Lane 55<br>Alley 17<br>Taipei, Taiwan<br>Republic of China |
|----|---|---|

While it is important that the teacher familiarize herself with the above analysis and examples, it is recommended that the Mandarin examples be eliminated from the in-class presentation and sole emphasis be given to the English format.

## II. Activities

### A. Student Interviews

This exercise will enable students to get to know each other better, while at the same time giving them lots of practice in writing addresses in English.

Put a model address on the board to serve as a guide for students during the activity. Each student must interview all of his classmates during the class hour and obtain their addresses. All interviews and subsequent listing of addresses must be accomplished using English. The teacher should make himself available for consultation with the students during the activity as they will undoubtedly have

questions, especially early on in the process. When all students have finished obtaining their classmates' addresses, they are then posted on the board and around the classroom and the students move from one to the other checking to see that their own address is written correctly. If they spot a mistake they should make the correction themselves. At the end of the period students should take down their list and use it for contacting classmates later on.

### III. Review and Practice

#### A. Filling Out Applications

This exercise will give the students an opportunity to combine address writing with another practical skill: filling out job applications in English. Obtain a standard application from the school office, or outline one of your own, but make sure it asks for the following information: name, address (including number, street, apartment number, city, state or province, country, zip code), phone number, position desired, salary desired, education (including name and address of all schools attended), work history (including name, address, job title and description of duties, and reason for leaving), person to contact in case of emergency



(name, address, phone number), and date of application and signature.

The class may want to fill one out together with the teacher prior to doing their own. When all students have completed an application, do a follow-up exercise reviewing the process so that students know if they made mistakes, and what they were.

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