

Why Chinese is an Easy Language to Learn

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People talk a lot about the difficulties of learning Chinese, but they rarely examine why Chinese can be a very easy language to learn.

However, Chinese is a much simpler language than English, French, or Spanish in a number of ways. It is hard to explain until you dive in and experience it for yourself, but Chinese is very straightforward. Unlike English, it rarely breaks its own rules.

Do you remember learning your spelling in grade school? "I before E except after C?" English is full of different little rules that sometimes have thousands of exceptions. As an English teacher, I really discovered how difficult it is to explain English to Chinese people. They're baffled by the nonsense of it.

Think of this: What is the difference between "overlook" and "oversee"? Oversee means to monitor and direct something, while overlook means to miss or neglect something. They mean the opposite, while "look" and "see" mean almost the same thing. Chinese rarely does this.

If you've learned French, Spanish, or other European languages than you're familiar with the frustration of verb conjugation. If the only language you speak is English, you may have no idea how complicated your language is. Consider this - I am writing, I wrote, I have written, I will write, are all forms of the same verb, and it's necessary to memorize this in order to learn it. In Chinese, this is much simpler. Past, present, and future tense are easy to express with rules that have very few exceptions.

Chinese cuts out all of the articles that are in English. As English speakers, we're constantly injecting words into sentences, like "the" "a", "an" etc. Chinese doesn't have these, and you'll find that they're really unnecessary. Chinese even cuts "is" out of most sentences. Instead of saying "I am hungry", you can say "I hungry" and get the same meaning.

The result is - Chinese trims the fat off language. There are fewer rules, and fewer exceptions to those rules. Chinese grammar is uncomplicated, and so the major challenges that face students of Chinese language are vocabulary and pronunciation, both of which come easily with steady practice.

It is easy to focus on the differences between Chinese and English, but few people stop to notice the similarities that make things easy. English and Chinese are both subject verb object (SVO) languages. Sentences like "I kick the ball" run in the same order, while other languages switch it around (ball kick I, Kick ball I, I ball kick, etc).

So there's no reason to be intimidated by Chinese. It is classified as one of the hardest languages for English speakers to learn, but that's an imaginary barrier. Some parts are harder, but many parts are MUCH easier. So take advantage of this, and dive in.