

GETTING HELP WITH YOUR CHINESE

(adapted from *Getting Help with your Thai* by Adrian S. Palmer)

Chinese people often take great delight in helping foreigners with their Chinese. So how can we help them help us better?

Asking for Repetition

In the early stages of learning Chinese, the message we most often need to send is, "What did you just say?" "Please say it again." "Please speak more slowly." Here are a few useful phrases:

What did you just say?	你刚才说什么？
I didn't understand.	我听不懂。
Please say it again.	请你再说一次。
Please speak slower.	请你说慢一点儿。
I'm sorry, I still don't understand.	对不起，我还是(听)不懂。
How should I have said that sentence?	那句话我应该怎么说？

If you still didn't understand what the other person said after they have repeated their sentence, you may need to add on an excuse for asking them to say it yet again:

I'm sorry, I've just started learning Chinese, may I trouble you to say it again.	对不起，我刚刚开始学汉语，麻烦你再说一次。
I'm sorry, I didn't hear clearly, please say it again.	对不起，我没听清楚，请你再说一次。

Asking for Repetition of a Single Word within a Sentence

Sometimes, we miss just one word and so need the other person to simply focus on that word.

You just said something that sounded like ..., please say it again.
你刚才说的，好像是 ..., 请你再说一次。

What was the word before/after ...?	... 前面/后面的字是什么？
And then what did you say?	然后呢？
And still then ... ?	... 还有呢？
What was the first word you just said?	你刚才说的 第一个字是什么？
What about (e.g. the book)?	(书) 怎么样？

When you catch the grammar of the utterance, but not all of the content, you can use the following Question Words to isolate the part of the sentence you missed.

What ... ? 什么 ... ?

Which ... ? 哪一 + M ... ?

When ... ? 什么时候 ... ?

How much/many ... ? 多少 ... ? or 几个 ... ?

Who ... ? 谁 ... ?

Why ... ? 为什么 ... ?

How ... ? 怎么 ... ?

Where ... ? 哪里 ... ?

Eliciting Words

Your passive listening vocabulary (i.e. words you recognize when spoken to you) will always be way ahead of your active speaking vocabulary, so we need some techniques and useful phrases to elicit words we have learnt but failed to recall.

(holding up an object) How do you say this in Chinese?

(这个东西) 汉语怎么说?

How do you say 'teacher' in Chinese?

'Teacher' 汉语怎么说?

The word sounds a little like ... / The word sounds the same as ...

那个字(听起来)有点儿像 ... / 那个字听起来跟 ... 一样。

What do you clean your teeth with?

你用什么东西刷牙?

Naming categories: It's a kind of (e.g. animal) 是一种 (动物)

Naming parts: It's part of a car. 是车的一部份。

Describing: It's green and has lots of leaves. 是绿的，而且有很多叶子。

Describing: What do you call the thing you wear on your head? 戴在头上的东西叫做什么?

Acting: What's this action called? 这个动作叫什么?

Acting: When you are (e.g. tired), what do you normally do? 你(累)的时候，平常做什么?

Opposites: What's the opposite of ... ?

... 的相反是什么?

Relationships: It has to do with hospitals.

是跟医院有关。

Comparison: It's like a cat, but bigger.

很像猫，但是比较大。

Profession/job: The person who works in a church.

(是) 在教会工作的人。

Location: It lives in the sea.

(是) 在海里生活的东西。

Uses: It's used to cut things.

(是) 切东西用的。

Hesitating: I need to buy a ... (while you act it out)

我需要买一+M ...

Asking for Meanings

What does ... mean ?
What is the meaning of the first word ... ?
What do you mean?
What (thing/matter) are you referring to?
What (matter) are you talking about?

... 是什么意思？
第一个字是什么意思？
你的意思是什么？
你指的是什么(东西/事情)？
你说的是关于什么(事情)？

Asking for further Details

What is ... like?
How is ... normally used?
Where is ... normally found?
Who normally uses one?
What is it made of?

... 像什么东西？
... 平常怎么用？
... 平常在哪里看得到的？
... 平常谁最常用到这个东西？
... 是用什么做的？

Asking Someone to Write it down

Please write it down.
How do you write that character/word?

请你写下来。
那个字怎么写？

More Excuses

Oh dear! I've forgotten!
I'm really stupid!
I've learnt it before, but I can't recall it.

哎呀！我忘了！
我真笨！
我学过，但是想不起来。

And finally, don't forget to thank those who help you! They are worth their weight in gold!