

Complete Lesson Transcript – Lesson 004

Hosts: Adam Menon / Kirin Yang

Adam: [Dàjiā hǎo](#) . [Wǒ shì Adam](#) .

Kirin: [Dàjiā hǎo](#) . [Wǒ shì Kirin](#) .

Adam: Welcome to lesson 4 of ChineseLearnOnline.com. Today we're going to continue where we left off in lesson three talking about countries, nationalities and their languages. We're now going to try and put together what we know so far. We know how to say "I am" and we know how to say the names of a few countries. So with that in mind, how would you say "I am American"?

Kirin: [Wǒ shì Měiguó rén](#) .

Adam: Good, I hope you got that right. Let's try another one. How would you ask "Are you Chinese?"

Kirin: [Nǐ shì Zhōngguó rén ma?](#)

Adam: As you can see, adding the [ma](#) at the end turns a statement into a question. Today, we're going to try and answer some yes or no questions. Now one big difference in Chinese is that there is no definitive word for 'yes' or 'no,' so you have to follow a particular syntax when answering such questions. Now if you wanted to answer in the affirmative as in "Yes, I am Chinese," you would reply with:

Kirin: [Shì, wǒ shì Zhōngguó rén](#) .

Adam: Now, there are no new words there as you can see. We reply in affirmative by restating the verb in question – in this case it's the verb "to be" or [shì](#) . So the reply here means "Yes, I am Chinese." Let's try another one. Ask if I am Canadian.

Kirin: [Nǐ shì Jiānádà rén ma?](#)

Adam: So if you wanted to reply 'yes,' you would say:

Kirin: [Shì, wǒ shì Jiānádà rén](#) .

Adam: Now, you'll learn the word used for the negative which is quite simply

Kirin: [Bù](#)

Adam: That's a falling tone although sometimes it's turns into a rising tone depending on where it's used.

Kirin: [Bù](#)

Adam: By adding **bù** in front of a verb, you negate it. So let's ask the question "Are you British?"

Kirin: **Nǐ shì Yīngguó rén ma?**

Adam: To reply in the negative we'd say:

Kirin: **Bú shì . Wǒ bú shì Yīngguó rén .**

Adam: On our website ChineseLearnOnline.com in the Premium lesson notes for [lesson 4](#) you'll find several more examples using this structure. Let's now learn a couple of new verbs. The first one is...

Kirin: **Huì**

Adam: This is a falling tone.

Kirin: **Huì**

Adam: Now the verb **huì** means "to be able to do something." We'll use it in a moment. The other verb I want to introduce is:

Kirin: **Shuō**

Adam: This is a high tone.

Kirin: **Shuō**

Adam: The verb **shuō** means "to speak." Putting these two verbs together we get:

Kirin: **Huì shuō**

Adam: ...which means "to be able to speak."

Kirin: **Huì shuō**

Adam: So with that in mind, can you guess what this next question means?

Kirin: **Nǐ huì shuō Zhōngwén ma?**

Adam: Again?

Kirin: **Nǐ huì shuō Zhōngwén ma?**

Adam: So by the **ma** at the end, we know that's a question – and in fact the question translates to "Can you speak Chinese?"

Kirin: **Nǐ huì shuō Zhōngwén ma?**

Adam: Now knowing what we know about how we answer such questions how would you answer that question in the affirmative?

Kirin: **Huì . Wǒ huì shuō Zhōngwén .**

Adam: And how would you reply "No, I can't speak Chinese"?

Kirin: [Bú huì](#) . [Wǒ bú huì shuō Zhōngwén](#) .

Adam: Now perhaps as beginners your current answer to the question of “Can you speak Chinese?” may be ‘no,’ but we hope to change that over time. So to build up your confidence, perhaps you would like to answer with “I can speak a little.” How do we say “a little”?

Kirin: [Yidiǎn](#)

Adam: That’s a high tone followed by a falling rising tone.

Kirin: [Yidiǎn](#)

Adam: So how would you say “I can speak a little”?

Kirin: [Wǒ huì shuō yìdiǎn](#) .

Adam: Great, so let’s do some practice with the vocabulary we have learned. First I’ll ask you to translate the following from English to Chinese. Please try this by yourself before listening to the answer. So the first one is “Are you Australian?”

Kirin: [Nǐ shì Àozhōurén ma?](#)

Adam: No, I am American.

Kirin: [Bú shì](#) , [wǒ shì Měiguórén](#) .

Adam: Can you speak French?

Kirin: [Nǐ huì shuō Fàwén ma?](#)

Adam: No I can’t. I can speak English.

Kirin: [Bú huì](#) . [Wǒ huì shuō Yīngwén](#) .

Adam: Good, we’ll now teach the possessive particle. We know how to say ‘I’:

Kirin: [Wǒ](#)

Adam: How do we say ‘my’?

Kirin: [Wǒde](#)

Adam: So you can see how easy that is. Just add the neutral tone [de](#) and you get the possessive. Similarly, to say ‘your’ we can use:

Kirin: [Nǐde](#)

Adam: Good, I think you can see how easy this is and how it extends to other pronouns. A more detailed list can be found in the Premium lesson notes for Lesson 4 on our website. Now based on what you’ve learned, what do you think the following sentence means?

Kirin: [Nǐ Zhōngwén shuō de hěn hǎo](#) .

Adam: This one may be a little tricky but if you look at the literal translation you might figure it out. “You Chinese speak’s very good.” Basically, that means “Your Chinese is very good.” You could use that same construction to tell someone their English was very good too.

While it is not our goal to go into too much detail on the grammar usage in Chinese, the basic reason why we say “you Chinese” here and not “your Chinese” is that when you have multiple occurrences of **de** in a sentence, the first ones are sometimes omitted. As an example in English, I could say “Kirin’s brother’s cat” whereas in Chinese that might become “Kirin brother’s cat.” Since there is already a **de** after **shuō**, it isn’t used after **nǐ**.

Again our whole manner of teaching on this site is similar to how we learn our native language by just imitating the speech we hear around us and picking up the grammar as we go along.

Now, just as a culture note, I’ve noticed that even if you just say something simple in Chinese, such as **xièxie nǐ**, they tend to get very excited and will often compliment your Chinese in the above manner. So Kirin if this happens, as it inevitably will if you keep following along in our podcasts, what’s the best way to answer?

Kirin: I think you can just say thank you. **Xièxie**.

Adam: Great. Now let’s look at if you just wanted to tell someone “I’m sorry, my Chinese isn’t very good.” First we need the word for “I’m sorry.” It’s actually the same word they use for “excuse me.” How do we say that, Kirin?

Kirin: **Duìbuqǐ**.

Adam: So it’s actually three words. The first two use falling tones and the last word uses a falling rising tone. Let’s hear it again.

Kirin: **Duìbuqǐ**.

Adam: So that means “I’m sorry” or “excuse me.”

Now to say “My Chinese isn’t good,” you actually have all the vocabulary necessary to say that. Let’s see if we can put it together.

Kirin: **Wǒ Zhōngwén shuō de bù hǎo**.

Adam: Again.

Kirin: **Wǒ Zhōngwén shuō de bù hǎo**.

Adam: Great, so lots of new words and phrases today. That brings us to an end to lesson four of ChineseLearnOnline.com. Don’t worry – we’ll be reviewing it all in future lessons. **Xièxiè dà jiā**.

Kirin: **Zàijiàn**.