The *Learn a Chinese Phrase* video series has been produced with the idea that if a phrase is fun or amusing, the learner will be more likely to remember it. Although many phrases we introduce may be memorable, as language instructors we realize that learners must ultimately utilize and regenerate the words and structures within these phrases if they are to become proficient in the language. In essence, we are drawing learners from the enticing (i.e. “sugar coated”) metaphorical phrase to the mechanics of learning individual words, their usage, and their potential expansion.

Verbs in one language seldom correspond perfectly with their alleged counterparts in another language. The verb “to know” in English, for example, is generally translated into Chinese as “zhī dào” when it means “to know a fact” or “to know a person by reputation”, but as “rèn shǐ” when it refers to “better knowing” or “meeting a person for the first time.” Because of these obvious linguistic differences and potential pitfalls, we have taken considerable pains to demonstrate as simply and as clearly as possible how targeted verbs should and should not be used.

Nouns, though less subject to change between languages (a rose is a rose is a rose!), generally offer a platform for vocabulary expansion in Chinese. Given the lack of cognates between Chinese and English, any chance to expand one’s vocabulary by easy association should be seized! Thus, when the noun “niú” is introduced as the Chinese word for “cow,” for example, we show the learner that several important compound words also include “niú”, such as “niú pái” (“steak” or literally “cow ribs”), “niú ròu” (“beef” or literally “cow meat”), “niú nǎi” (“milk” or literally “cow milk”), and “niú pí” (“leather” or literally “cow skin”).

Of course, we realize that learning a language is an arduous and often uncomfortable process. We are also aware that in the quest to acquire a primary language, children crave comfort and repetition. With these two concepts in mind, we have placed a special emphasis on creating a highly consistent, visually pleasing, and unintimidating layout that will be of special help to visual learners. Our goal, thus, is to teach simple and concise lessons where possible, rather than to be highly thorough or exhaustive. Additionally, we understand that like a children’s book, a language study guide should be inviting and reviewed on a frequent basis!

It may be important to briefly address the question “Why idioms?” In addition to the assertion that they are fun, interesting, and a window on culture, it is critical to note that the majority of any given language is metaphorical or non-literal. Beyond ordering food, asking for directions and simple negotiation, there is a never-ending world of culturally-based metaphors and idioms to be encountered in daily conversation. This highly important aspect of language cannot be ignored.

In sum, we hope that our *Learn a Chinese Phrase* videos, supplementary videos, and *Supplementary Learner’s Guide* will help provide Chinese language learners not only with phrases to pepper their conversations and amuse their Chinese-speaking friends, but with multiple platforms on which they can build their vocabulary and generate new sentences, which is so very critical in the language learning process!
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Play Zither for a Cow
“Casting Pearls before Swine”

duì niú tán qín
对牛弹琴

Tā zài duì niú tán qín.

Example: 他在对牛弹琴。

qín
琴 n. general name for a musical instrument

tán
弹 v. to play a stringed instrument that requires plucking or pounding

gāngqín钢琴 piano
shùqín竖琴 harp

lā
拉 v. to play an instrument using a bow

dàtiqín大提琴 cello
zhōngtíqín中提琴 viola
xiǎotíqín小提琴 violin

Wǒ huì tán gāngqín.
I can play piano.

Wǒ huì tán shùqín.
I can play harp.

Wǒ huì lā dàtiqín.
I can play cello.

Wǒ huì lā zhōngtíqín.
I can play viola.

Wǒ huì lā xiǎotíqín.
I can play violin.

Cultural Note:
Additional verbs in Chinese for playing a musical instrument include:

dǎ
dǎ
Tā zài dǎgǔ.
He is playing the drums.

chuī
chūi
Tā zài chuī dízi.
He is playing the flutes.

Tā huì chuī Sàkesī.
He can play saxophone.
xīnshǒu  
新手

“Green Horn” “Newbie”

Wǒ shì kāi chē xīnshǒu.

Example: 我是开车新手。

xīn
新  adj. new

xīn yīfu  
新衣服  
new clothes

xīn wánjù  
新玩具  
new toy

xīn gē  
新歌  
new song

xīn yīfu  
新衣服  
new clothes

yi běn xīn shū  
一本新书  
a new book

yi gè xīn wánjù  
一个新玩具  
a new toy

yi shǒu xīn gē  
一首新歌  
a new song

xīn
新  adj. newly/recently

xīn de  
(new+v. +的+n.)

xīn lái de xuéshēng  
新来的学生  
newly-arrived student

xīn mǎi de chē  
新买的车  
newly-bought car

Xīn xiě de shū  
新写的书  
newly-written book(s)

gēshǒu  
歌手  
singer  
lit: song hand

gǔshǒu  
鼓手  
drummer  
lit: drum hand

zhǔshǒu  
助手  
assistant  
lit: assist hand

bāngshǒu  
帮手  
helper  
lit: help hand

shuǐshǒu  
水手  
sailor  
lit: water hand

shǒu  
n. a person associated with a job or profession

gè   wèi  
个; 位 (respect);
**hútuchóng**  
糊 涂 虫  
*Mixed-up Bug*  
“Space Cadet”

Tā shì gè hútuchóng.

*Example:*  他是个糊涂虫。

**hútu**  
糊 涂  adj. muddled or confused

| hútu zhàng | chaotic financial records  
| lit: muddled records |
| Zhè shì yī bǐ hútu zhàng. | This is a muddled account. |

| zhuāng hútu | pretend to be confused (play dumb) |
| Tā zài zhuāng hútu. | He is playing dumb. |

| Wǒ yǒu diǎnr hútu. | I’m a little bit confused. |

**chóng**  
虫  n. insect or worm  
zhī

| kūnchóng | insect |
| hàichóng | pests |
| huángchóng | locust |
| piáochóng | ladybug |
| máomaochóng | caterpillar |
| yīnghuǒchóng | fire fly |
**Sing the Opposite Tune**

*Naysayer"/"Contrarian"

**Example:** 你跟我唱反调。

**Nǐ gēn wǒ chàng fǎndiào.**

chàng

唱 v. to sing

fǎn

反 adj. in the opposite direction; reverse; inside out

dúchàng

独唱

solo

chóngchàng

重唱

duet lit: layer singing

héchàng

合唱

choir lit: together singing

diào

调 n. tune/key

qǔdiào

曲调 tune; melody

zǒudiào

走调 out of tune; off key

lǎodiào

老调 old tune

gāo/low/diào

高/低/C调

high key/low key/the key of C

di yī shēngdiào

第一声调 first tone

di èr shēngdiào

第二声调 second tone

shēngdiào

升调 rising tone

jiàngdiào

降调 falling tone

Yìngbì de fǎnmiàn yǒu yī duǒ huā.

硬币的反面有一朵花。

The coin's reverse side has a flower.

Tā bǎ wàzi chuān fǎn le.

他把袜子穿反了。

He wears his socks inside out.

Túshūguǎn zài yīyuàn de fǎn fāngxiàng.

图书馆在医院的反方向。

The Library is in the opposite direction of the hospital.
báifèi kǒushé
白费口舌
Wasting Mouth and Tongue
“Wasting Your Breath”

Nǐ báifèi kǒushé.
Example: 你白费口舌。

fèi
费 v. to cost/take (time or effort)

Zhè jiàn shì hěn fèi shíjiān.
这件事很费时间。
It takes a lot of time.

Dǎsǎo fángjiān hěn fèilì.
打扫房间很费力。
Cleaning the house takes a lot of

fèi
（交/付+）费 n. fee

xuékè
学费 tuition lit: study fee

shuǐdiànfèi
水电费 utilities lit: water and electricity fee

yóufèi
邮费 postage lit: postage fee

báifèi
白费 v. to waste

báifèi jīnglì
白费精力 to waste mental or physical effort

báifèi gōngfu
白费功夫 to waste physical effort lit: to waste work

báifèi shíjiān
白费时间 to waste time

báifèi liqi
白费力气 to waste strength

kǒu
口 n. mouth

kǒuxiāngtáng
口香糖 chewing gum lit: mouth fragrant candy

Tā zài jiáo kǒuxiāngtáng.
他在嚼口香糖。
He is chewing gum.

kǒuyǔ
口语 spoken language lit: mouth language

Tā zài liàn xí zhōngwén kǒuyǔ.
他在练习中文口语。
He is practicing spoken Chinese.
Radish Cabbage

“Radish Cabbage” or “Luóbo báicài” is a phrase used to illustrate the idea that everyone has their own preferences or loves.

Example: 萝卜白菜, 各有所爱。 Luóbo báicài, gè yǒu suǒ ài.

Luóbo báicài, 各有所爱。

Example: 萝卜白菜, 各有所爱。

Luóbo báicài, 各有所爱。

Example: 萝卜白菜, 各有所爱。
Nǐ de yīfu hěn léirén.

*Example:* 你的衣服很雷人。

**léirén**

雷人

“Shockling Someone”

**Caution:**

“雷” is only used as a verb with the noun “人”.

**Cultural Note:**

Wàimén diàn shǎn léi míng.

Outside it’s lightning and thundering.

lit: Outside electricity strikes and thunder sounds.
Giving Strength
“Encouraging/ Flattering”

Nǐ de lǎoshī hěn gěilì.

**Example:** 你的老师很给力。

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>gěi</th>
<th>gěi</th>
<th>gěi</th>
<th>bà</th>
<th>bà</th>
<th>bà</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>给 v. to give (给+sb.+sth.)</td>
<td>给 v. to give (把+sth.+给+sb.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qǐng gěi wǒ yàoshi.</td>
<td>Qǐng bā shū gěi wǒ.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please give me the keys.</td>
<td>Please give me the book.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bié gěi tā zhàopiàn.</td>
<td>Bié bà pánzi gěi tā.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please don’t give him the photos.</td>
<td>Please don’t give him the plates.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**li**
力 n. power; strength; ability

tīngli
听力 hearing or listening ability

wǒlì
握力 grip strength

jìyì lì
记忆力 ability to remember/memorize

**Cultural Note:**

gěilì
给力 is a term that gained popularity on the internet in China. The original meaning was to give someone strength, but it soon came to be used as “encouraging.”
diàndēngpào
电灯泡
“Third Wheel”

Tā shì gè diàndēngpào.

Example: 他是个电灯泡。

diàn
dìàn 电 n. electricity
diànchí 电 池 battery
diànnǎo 电 脑 computer
diàndòng yáshuā 电动牙刷 electric toothbrush

dēng
dēng 灯 n. lamp; light; lantern
zhǎn gè mw: 盏; 个

pào
pào 泡 n. bubble; blister; something shaped like bubbles
qìpào 气泡 air bubbles
(i.e. carbonated beverage)
qìpào yú 气泡鱼 puffer fish
shuǐpào 水泡 bubbles/blister
lit: water bubbles
féizāo pào 肥 皂泡 soap bubbles
Tā jiǎo shàng qǐ pào le. 他脚上起泡了。He has blisters on his feet.
p ào p ào v. to soak; to steep
pàocài 泡菜 kimchi

Chēn yī pào zài shuǐ lǐ. 衬衣泡在水里。The shirts are soaking (in the water).
Shuíjiào qián páozǎo 睡觉前泡澡。Before sleeping, take a bath.
Wǒ gěi kèrén páochá. 我给客人泡茶。I make/steep/brew tea for the guests.

lùdēng 路灯 street light
táidēng 台灯 table/desk lamp
dēngtǎ 灯塔 lighthouse
hónglǜdēng 红绿灯 traffic lights
### Fall into Love River

**“Fall in Love”**

Nǐ zhuì rù àihé le.

**Example:** 你坠入爱河了。

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ōu</th>
<th>v. to fall; to drop; to tumble</th>
<th>zhù</th>
<th>n. weight; hanging object</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fēijī zhuì rù dàhǎi.</td>
<td>飞机坠入大海。</td>
<td>The plane fell into the ocean.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shù shàng de guǒzi yáoyáo yùzhuì.</td>
<td>树上的果子摇摇欲坠。</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>hé</th>
<th>n. river</th>
<th>tiáo</th>
<th>mw: 条</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Huáng Hé</td>
<td>黄 河</td>
<td>the Yellow River *</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hé’àn</td>
<td>河 岸</td>
<td>river bank</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>héliú</td>
<td>河 流</td>
<td>river</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yǔnhé</td>
<td>运河</td>
<td>canal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>lit: transporting river</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>rùkǒu</th>
<th>v. enter; join; become a member of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>rùkǒu</td>
<td>入口</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rūjīng</td>
<td>入境</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rùmén</td>
<td>入门</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rùxué</td>
<td>入学</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* **Huáng Hé**

The Yellow River is the second-longest river in Asia after the Yangtze River, and the sixth-longest in the world with an estimated length of 5,464 km.