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An Excerpt from Lesson One in Traditional Characters &
ㄅ ㄆ ㄇ ㄉ:

老師
再見。
同學們
再見。

是的，
我們
都是
好學生。

你們
是好
學生
嗎？

我是
學生，
他
也是
學生。

您
是老師，
不是
學生。

老師
早。
同學們
早。

第一課
我是
學生。

An Excerpt from Lesson One in Traditional Characters & MPS II:

老	是	你	我	您	老	第
師	的	們	是	是	師	一
再	，	是	學	老	早	課
見	我	好	生	師	。	
。	們	學	，	，	同	我
同	都	生	他	不	學	是
學	是	嗎	也	是	們	學
們	好	？	是	學	早	生
再	學		學	生	。	
見	生		生	。		
。	。		。			

An Excerpt from Lesson One in Simplified Characters & Pinyin:

老 lǎo 是 shì 你 nǐ 我 wǒ 您 nín 老 lǎo 第
师 shī 的 de 们 men 是 shì 是 shì 师 shī 一
再 zài , 是 shì 学 xué 老 lǎo 早 zǎo 课
见 jiàn 我 wǒ 好 hǎo 生 shēng 师 shī 。
。 们 men 学 xué , , 同 tóng 我
同 tóng 都 dōu 生 shēng 他 tā 不 bú 学 xué 是
学 xué 是 shì 吗 ma 也 yě 是 shì 们 men 学
们 men 好 hǎo ? 是 shì 学 xué 早 zǎo 生
再 zài 学 xué 学 xué 生 shēng 。
见 jiàn 生 shēng 生 shēng 。
。 。 。

Lesson 1: I Am a Student

Good morning, teacher. Good morning, class.

You are a teacher, not a student.

I am a student. He is also a student.

Are you good students?

Yes, we are all good students.

Good-bye, teacher. Good-bye, class.

稱呼 Form of Address

先生 mister (Mr.); gentlemen; sir; one's husband

小姐 Miss

女士 Ma'am; madam; ladies

太太 mistress (Mrs.); one's wife

師傅 a skilled person like carpenter, cook, etc.

老闆 / 老板 a boss; a store keeper

老板娘 a female boss: a female store keeper

1. 各位 (each; every) 先生、女士，您好。

Hi ladies and gentlemen!

2. 老板娘，請 (please) 給 (to give) 我一碗拉麵。

Ma'am, please give me a bowl of hand-pulled noodles.

1. 們 a plural suffix only used with pronouns and a few human nouns to form a collective meaning, such as friends, teachers, comrades, etc.

我	I	我們	we
你	you	你們	you
他	he	他們	they
同學們	students	老師們	teachers

2. 的 is a possessive suffix.

我的	my, mine	我們的	our, ours
你的	your, yours	你們的	your, yours
他的	his, his	他們的	their, theirs

1. 這是我的書。

This is my book.

2. 這是我的。

This is mine.

3. 是 “be” is the copula verb in Mandarin. It is used in all the singular and plural pronouns.

我是	I am	我們是	we are
你是	you are	你們是	you are
他是	he is	他們是	they are

1. 他是學生。

He is a student.

2. 他們是學生。

They are students.

3. 我們是老同學。

We are old classmates.

4. Adverbs 也 , 都 are placed in front of verbs.

1. 她是好老師。

She is a good teacher.

2. 他也是好老師。

He is also a good teacher.

3. 他們都是好老師。

They are all good teachers.

5. 不 not, placed in front of a verb or an adjective to form a negative sentence.

subject + 不 + be / verb + object

subject + 不 + adjective

1. 我不是學生。

I am not a student.

2. 他不學中文。

He does not learn Chinese.

3. 你不老。

You are not old.

6. 嗎 a question word, placed in the end of a sentence to form an interrogative sentence.

subject + be / verb + object + 嗎

subject + adjective + 嗎

1. 他是老師嗎？

Is he a teacher?

2. 您是他的老同學嗎？

Are you his old classmate?

3. 你好嗎？

How are you?

4. 他老嗎？

Is he old?

5. 他學中文嗎？

Does he learn Chinese?

We can also form an interrogative sentence without using the question word 嗎. Simply use this formula:

subject + be/verb + 不 + be/verb + object

subject + adjective + 不 + adjective

1. 他是不是老師？

Is he a teacher?

2. 您是不是他的老同學？

Are you his old classmate?

3. 你好不好？

How are you?

4. 他老不老？

Is he old?

5. 他學不學中文？

Does he learn Chinese?

If we compare question 3 and 4 to its English translation, we may notice that there is no copula be “是” in linking between the subject and the predicate in both sentences. Why?

Linguists often refer Chinese adjective to “stative verb,” which in plain English, a non-action linking verb, and the opposite of action verb. We know that:

A linking verb tells you something about the subject.

An action verb tells you what the subject is doing.

Thus, whenever you want to describe something in Chinese, the formula is: **subject + adjective**, without the copula be “是”. For example,

1. 我好 。 I good. (literally in Chinese) → I am fine. (in English)
2. 她老 。 She old. → She is old.
3. 美國大 。 America big. → America is big.
4. 我很^ㄣ好 。 I very good. → I am very well.
5. 她很老 。 She very old. → She is very old.
6. 美國很大 。 America very big. → America is very big.

However, influenced by their native English, beginners of Chinese often make a mistake by using the copula be “是” in describing a subject. They do not know that the way they speak conveys a different meaning to the Chinese ear. For example,

1. 我好 。 I am fine.
2. 我是好 。 It is true that I am fine.

Therefore, the copula be “是” is used only when one wants to affirm what had been said earlier by another speaker. “是” is no longer translated as “to be”, but “indeed” or “really”, and it must be stressed. For example,

A: 小王老了 。

Little Wang old. (literally) → Little Wang is getting old.

B: 小王是老了 。

Agreed on what A had said, B answered, “It is true that Little Wang is getting old.”

A: 日本人很愛國 。

Japanese very patriotic. (literally) → Japanese are very patriotic.

B: 日本人是很愛國 。

It is true that Japanese are very patriotic.

※ One exception: In English, we use an adjective to describe one’s nationality as “I am American”, but in Chinese, we have to say

我是美國人。 “I am an American person.”

Lesson 1: I Am a Student

1. 第^{ㄉㄣˋ} 竹^{ㄓㄨˊ} an ordinal prefix
2. 課^{ㄎㄜˋ} 言^ㄢ subject; course; lesson; class
3. 我^{ㄉㄨㄛˋ} 戈^{ㄍㄜ} I
4. 是^{ㄕㄧˋ} 日^{ㄖㄨˊ} to be; yes; right
5. 學^{ㄒㄩㄝˊ} 子^{ㄗㄩˇ} to learn
6. 生^{ㄕㄨㄥ} 生^{ㄕㄨㄥ} to grow; raw; to give birth
7. 老^{ㄌㄠˇ} 老^{ㄌㄠˇ} old; a prefix for nouns 老師，老虎^{ㄌㄠˊ ㄏㄨˇ}，老鼠^{ㄌㄠˊ ㄨˇ}
8. 師^{ㄕㄨㄣ} 巾^{ㄐㄩㄣ} teacher; master; a person skilled in a certain profession
9. 早^{ㄗㄠˇ} 日^{ㄖㄨˊ} morning; early
10. 同^{ㄊㄨㄥˊ} 口^{ㄎㄨˇ} same
11. 們^{ㄇㄣˊ} 人^{ㄖㄨˊ} a plural suffix
12. 您^{ㄋㄧㄣˊ} 心^{ㄒㄩㄣ} a respectful term for you
13. 不^{ㄅㄨˋ} 一^ㄧ no; not
14. 他^{ㄊㄚ} 人^{ㄖㄨˊ} he
15. 也^{ㄧㄝˇ} 乙^{ㄧˇ} also
16. 你^{ㄋㄩˇ} 人^{ㄖㄨˊ} you
17. 好^{ㄏㄠˇ} 女^{ㄋㄩˇ} good; very, how; all right

18. 嗎^{ㄇㄚˇ} 口^{ㄎㄨˇ} a question word
19. 的^{ㄉㄜˊ} 白^{ㄅㄞˊ} a possessive suffix
20. 都^{ㄉㄨ} 邑^{ㄧˋ} all; 都^{ㄉㄨ} 市^{ㄕㄨˋ} city
21. 再^{ㄗㄞˋ} 門^{ㄇㄢˊ} again; repeated; still; further; then
22. 見^{ㄐㄢˋ} 見^{ㄐㄢˋ} to see; to meet; to view
1. 老師 teacher
2. 學生 student
3. 同學 classmate
4. 再見 good-bye