

# Modern American English

LIVING & LEARNING IN THE WEST



## 現代美國口語



现代美国口语

# *MODERN AMERICAN ENGLISH*

Living & Learning in the West

[美] Naomi Woronov 编著  
[中] 戚云方



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## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the students of the Third and Fourth Academia Sinica Intensive English Training Courses conducted at Zhejiang University in Hangzhou between October, 1979 and July, 1981. It was at their suggestion that this book came into being, and it was their hard work and serious attention to every detail of each unit as it was being written which made the book possible.

There is an English expression that "two heads are better than one". We sincerely hope that both teachers and students will take seriously the task of sending us comments on your teaching and learning experiences and criticism of those aspects of the text that are good and useful, and those that fail to meet the stated purpose of the book and need to be revised for a second edition.

We would also like to express our thanks to our editor, Li Zhongxing (李中行), for his patience and his careful editing and design work, the Zhejiang University (浙江大学) Foreign Language Office typists for their fast and accurate work, and Song Mingyuan (宋明圆) who patiently sat through our endless discussions of every line of the text.

Special thanks go to Ruth Misheloff for her criticisms of the form, content and language and for contributing some of the exercises in the book.

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Hangzhou  
July, 1981

# INTRODUCTION

## I. OUR PURPOSE

This book has two purposes. First, it provides normal, everyday conversations so you can learn English sentence patterns, idioms and vocabulary the way you should—by listening to and speaking English. Secondly, the dialogues are carefully written to introduce you to those aspects of Western society you *must* know something about if you plan to live and learn in the West. The book emphasizes those points of Western life which are particularly different from Chinese customs and habits.

The selection of material is based on conversations with (and letters from) Chinese students and scholars living abroad, on classroom discussions here in China, on questions Chinese people often ask Westerners and on our own observations and discussions of the major differences between Chinese and Western societies.

In other words, the book is meant to tell you what you need to know in order to function in a Western country, and to teach you to speak and understand English at the same time.

The text has been tested out over the last two years—in various stages of its composition—in Academia Sinica English training courses at Zhejiang University in Hangzhou. It is designed for language/culture training courses for students and scholars going abroad; since it comes with a complete set of tapes, however, we believe it is also useful for self-taught students.

The dialogues are written in American rather than British English for several reasons: 1) in the years ahead more and more Chinese people will visit, study and work in the U.S.; 2) several British texts are currently available in China; and 3) the author is American. It should be noted, however, that Western libraries, banks, supermarkets, airports, etc. are very similar and we believe the book is equally valuable for those who are going to other Western countries.

Furthermore, the differences between British and American English are relatively minor—nothing like Chinese dialect differences. We have provided notes where British and American English vocabulary might cause confusion. There are also some pronunciation and vocabulary differences within the United States, but they almost never seriously interfere with communication and are, therefore, of no importance to you at this point in your studies.

## II. YOUR PURPOSE

Today Chinese children study 普通话 so that one day soon all Chinese people will have a common spoken language. You're studying English for a similar reason: to have a common means of communication with people from many (perhaps most) other nations.

You may be planning to go abroad to study or do scholarly research for a few years, or you may want to attend international conferences or business meetings. Perhaps you're not going abroad at all, but want to communicate with foreign guests in China. You may want

to be able to talk with them about finding a good restaurant or about splitting an atom. Or perhaps you'll have no contact with foreigners at all, but want to make use of the many foreign-language films, radio and TV programs, tapes, magazines and journals coming into China.

Whatever your reason, you need to remember that your purpose is *not* to speak perfect, beautiful English. *Your purpose is to understand and make yourself understood. If you hesitate to speak English because you're afraid of making mistakes you simply will never learn English.* The feudal idea of "losing face" if you make a mistake is your biggest obstacle to language learning. You *must* overcome it. Perhaps the first thing to understand about Western society is this: Westerners respect and help people who *try*—no matter how many errors they make; they have no respect for people who do not try for fear of making errors.

Do you think you could learn to play basketball by reading books and watching others play? Do you think you could learn to play a musical instrument by reading books on music theory and listening to recordings? You can't just think and talk about learning English; it's something you have to *do*, a physical *activity*. Like music, language uses sounds, so you must do most of your practicing *out loud*.

*You must also learn to be an active* rather than a passive student in class. Your teacher is not a mind-reader: if you don't understand something, he or she cannot know that unless you ask a question or ask for further explanation. You are *helping* the teacher by asking questions or asking for clarification. Again we would argue 1) that you "lose face" by remaining silent as well as remaining ignorant; 2) that it's good practice in formulating your ideas in English; and 3) that you will *not* be wasting other students' class time because if *you* are unclear about something, you can be sure that several other students are also. You can't expect your teacher to fill you up like an old vinegar bottle; you must actively participate in the learning process.

### III. TECHNIQUES FOR LEARNING ENGLISH

Basically, there are three processes involved in language learning: imitation, substitution and analysis.

#### A) IMITATION

You learned to speak Chinese when you were a preschooler by imitating adults. You unconsciously developed a whole system of sound and word order patterns. These are now habits. Because these habits will interfere with English, you have to learn a whole new set of habits, to make new sounds you've never made before and create sentence patterns which are strange to you. Try to concentrate on *English* sounds and sentence patterns instead of trying to find Chinese equivalents or trying to translate directly from the Chinese. Learn to *think* in English.

To do this you must imitate a model *speaking at normal speed*. This will be difficult and frustrating for you at first, but remember that no one in an English-speaking country speaks "Special English". Furthermore, the language changes dramatically as it is spoken more rapidly, and you'll find yourself unable to understand if you have only learned "Special English". Here's a simple example: "Do you understand what I mean?" becomes [dʒəndə'stænwədaɪ'mɪn] in ordinary English. (There are more examples in Appendix I in the back of the book.)

In the first month or so of the course you may understand only 20% or 25% of what the tapes or the teacher says. That's O K Don't worry about it. In another month you'll understand about 50% and by the end of the semester you'll understand most (and almost always the heart) of what a *normal speaker* says. Until you can do that you're not prepared to function abroad, so don't ask the teacher to slow down.

Listen carefully to the teacher and the tapes and practice imitating them aloud. *Concentrate on the spoken forms of phrases and sentences, not on the written forms in your text.* Repeat what you hear (not what you read) as closely as you can; your pronunciation will improve with practice. In Appendix I you'll also find practice exercises to help you overcome some of the major pronunciation problems faced by Chinese speakers of English. With the help of the teacher, determine what your particular problems are and work on them one by one, day by day. Remember to listen to the pitch levels of each phrase and imitate the rhythms of the language as well as the sounds. *Don't learn words singly; learn phrases.* This is a crucial point. If you read a sentence and look up each word in the dictionary, you'll often misunderstand its meaning. If you try to understand or speak English word by word, you will also create great confusion. This is not difficult to understand if you take any ordinary Chinese phrase and analyze it. For example, if a non-native speaker says, word by word, "我很高兴" you are likely to think "我很高" in your mind before you get to "兴".

In the text you'll find notes on phrases which can't be looked up word by word in the dictionary because the words function as idiomatic phrases. So it's crucial that you learn both to listen and to speak in word groups, not word by word. In Appendix I you'll also find some suggestions on how to determine word groups.

## B) SUBSTITUTION

In our experience, there is no substitution for substitution drills. Much of your time and energy in this course will be spent on them. Each begins with a model phrase or sentence from the text and then asks you to substitute other words or phrases in the same pattern. For example:

**MODEL:** Can I borrow your book for a few days?

**TEACHER:** bicycle

**STUDENT:** Can I borrow your bicycle for a few days?

**TEACHER:** hours

**STUDENT:** Can I borrow your bicycle for a few hours?

By practicing these patterns aloud over and over and learning to substitute new words and phrases within the pattern, you are learning to think in English instead of translating from Chinese. You don't have to rely on the teacher for such drills: using the patterns in the text, make up your own substitution drills as a form of study, but be sure to practice them aloud. This is also an excellent exercise for two or three students to work on together. Your substitution drills can begin with very simple sentences and become more complex as your language ability increases.

## C) ANALYSIS

"But I'm too old to learn a new language!" Nonsense! Children, of course, learn new sounds and patterns much more easily than you can. But to make up for this, you have greater patience, a better sense of purpose, more experience in learning—and you have the

advantage of being able to analyze your new language. You can see how an English sentence is put together, how it works, how it differs from Chinese. Grammatical explanations and rules are useful tools that can help you learn a language more rapidly. But learning *about* language is not the same as learning to *use* the language.

Talk. Talk. Talk. Inside and outside the classroom, speak English with your teacher and fellow students. You *can* say it in English. If you can't find just the right words, reorganize your thoughts and find another way to say what you mean. Don't give up and fall into Chinese.

Talk to yourself in the street: "I'm standing at the bus stop. If the bus doesn't come soon, I'll be late for work. Here comes the bus. It's too crowded. I can't get on it. I'll have to wait for the next bus." At home, talk to yourself *out loud*: "I'm hungry. I think I'll start making dinner. What are we going to have for dinner tonight?" Talk to tourists. They love it. Tourists are generally delighted to have some contact with "real" Chinese people (that is, someone other than their tourist guides) and they will generally be happy to talk to you as they walk in the parks or at the tourist sites.

Talk. Talk. Talk. Listen. Listen. Listen. Listen to VOA every night beginning with "Special English", then listening to the *same* news twice—first in "Special English", then in "Standard English". By the end of the semester you should be able to understand most of the regular news programs.

#### IV. A WORD ABOUT DICTIONARIES

Dictionaries are valuable tools for language study, but you must be flexible in your use of them. English is a living language: what is correct or incorrect, acceptable or unacceptable, current or out-of-date, changes over time. Furthermore, dictionary compilers make mistakes—yes, even grammatical errors. You cannot possibly understand the sentence patterns in this text by looking up every word in your dictionary.

You may begin the semester with an English-Chinese dictionary, but within a month you should begin using an English-English dictionary. *You should make all notes in your text in English, not in Chinese.* As you complete the study of each unit of the text, you should be sure that you can explain new idioms and words *in English*.

The use of an English-English dictionary and the habit of making notes in English instead of Chinese is a critical aspect of learning to think in English, learning to understand and speak English instead of "Chinglish".

#### V. THE STUDY GUIDE

Appendix I in the back of the text is a "Brief Guide to English for Chinese Speakers." The "Guide" lists the problems most Chinese people have learning English, and offers methods and practice exercises for overcoming those problems. We suggest you begin reading and working on this "Guide" after the first two or three weeks of the course, and then continue to use it to work on your particular problems throughout the course of your English study.

#### VI. LEARN TO BE EFFICIENT

Chinese students are generally willing to study very, very hard for long, long hours. This is an excellent characteristic, but it is often an inefficient method of study. An efficient student must have enough sleep, enough food and enough rest and

relaxation. Every day you need to take a walk or play basketball or ping-pong or sing a song or do something you find relaxing. Every now and then you need to go out with friends, see a movie, visit some scenic spots. When you return to your studies your mind will be refreshed and you'll learn more. *Shorter, more intense study sessions are more effective than endless hours of nodding over your books.*

Finally, be realistic. If you set impossible goals for yourself you can only be disappointed in your progress. Psychologists have determined that learning takes place this way: first, you make a lot of progress and you feel very happy. Then your language ability seems to stay the same; you believe you're not learning anything at all and you feel very disappointed with yourself. This period can last for days or even weeks, but you must not be discouraged. At some point your language ability will again take another big jump and you'll see that you really have been learning all along.

Perhaps we can say that learning English is like taking Chinese medicine. We don't mean that it's bitter — in fact, if you get enough sleep, food, rest and relaxation, studying English can be very enjoyable. We mean that, like Chinese medicine, the effects of your study come slowly but surely. Don't give up along the way. Learn slowly, slowly every day and the effects will come — like Chinese medicine.

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Some of the ideas in this *Introduction* and in *Appendix I* are taken from Nancy Duke Lays of the City University of New York and from a Modern Language Association article on learning languages.

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# UNIT ONE

## GREETINGS AND INTRODUCTIONS

When you are with a friend or acquaintance and you bump into someone you know, <sup>1)</sup> it is always polite to introduce them to one another. This introduction should include names, titles where appropriate, <sup>2)</sup> and a very brief description of their relationship to you so that the two people have a basis to start a conversation if they wish to.

### PRACTICE DIALOGUES

#### 1. IN THE STREET

SMITH: Hello, Zhou.

ZHOU: Hello, Mr. Smith. I haven't seen you for a long time. How's everything going?<sup>3)</sup>

SMITH: Fine, thanks.

ZHOU: Have you met my friend, Wang Dawei?

SMITH: No, I haven't had the pleasure.<sup>4)</sup>

ZHOU: Mr. Smith, this is my good friend Wang Dawei. Mr. Wang, John Smith.

SMITH: How do you do, Mr. Wang?<sup>5)</sup>

WANG: Pleased to meet you, Mr. Smith.

ZHOU: Mr. Wang is also a scientist. He and I attend the same lectures here and we're both working on the same experiment at the University.

SMITH: Good. You must help each other a good deal.<sup>6)</sup> Well, I have to go. See you later.<sup>7)</sup>



#### 2. IN THE DEPARTMENT OFFICE

[Zhou Jianguo and Wang Dawei are filling out some forms<sup>8)</sup> at the request of the department secretary when Dr. Gerald Johnson comes by on his way to his office.]

JOHNSON: Oh, hello, Mr. Zhou. How are you?<sup>9)</sup>

ZHOU: I'm fine, thank you, Dr. Johnson, how are you?

JOHNSON: Good, thanks.

ZHOU: Dr. Johnson, I'd like you to meet my good friend and colleague, Wang Dawei. We worked together in the Optical Engineering Department at Zhejiang University for many years. Mr. Wang is also here as a visiting scholar now. (Turning to Wang) This is my advisor, Dr. Gerald Johnson, Chairman of our department.

WANG: How do you do?

JOHNSON: I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Wang. Welcome to our university. Mr. Zhou has told us so much about Hangzhou, I feel as though I've been there. How long have you been in the States?

WANG: I've only been here a few weeks, but I plan to stay at least two years.

JOHNSON: That's fine. Zhou, the next time you come and have dinner with us you must bring Mr. Wang along with you.

WANG: That's very kind of you. I'd be delighted to come.

ZHOU: I'll certainly do that, thank you.

JOHNSON: Good-bye. It was nice meeting you.<sup>10)</sup>

ZHOU & WANG: Good-bye.

### 3. ON THE CAMPUS

[Zhou is recognized one afternoon by a woman he met recently, but he can't remember her name. She walks up to Zhou and Wang.]

WHITE: Hi,<sup>11)</sup> aren't you Zhou Jianguo? We met the other night at a USCPFA <sup>12)</sup> dinner.

ZHOU: Oh yes, of course. How nice to see you again. I'd like you to meet my friend and colleague, Wang Dawei. We worked together for many years at Zhejiang University. Wang, this is ... I'm sorry. I've forgotten your name.

WHITE: White, Betty White. I'm glad to meet you. Are you also a visiting scholar here?

WANG: Yes, I am. Mr. Zhou and I are both in the optical instruments area, and we're sharing an apartment here now.

WHITE: Wonderful. Welcome to our country and our campus. I'm sure we'll get a chance to talk at greater length. Are you both planning to come to our October 1st celebration next week?

ZHOU: By all means. <sup>13)</sup> We're very pleased that so many Americans celebrate the anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic.

WHITE: Good. I'll see you then. Nice to have met you, Mr. Wang.

WANG: Good-bye.

ZHOU: Good-bye.

WHITE: So long.

### 4. IN THE SUPERMARKET

[Zhou and Wang are shopping in the local supermarket one day when they run into Barbara Johnson, the wife of Dr. Gerald Johnson, and Cindy Johnson, their daughter.]

JOHNSON: Hi. How are you? My God, <sup>14)</sup> these prices are ridiculous, aren't they? If I'm having a hard time of it, <sup>15)</sup> I can't imagine how you can make ends meet.<sup>16)</sup>

ZHOU: Believe me, it isn't easy. But we're managing all right. Mrs. Johnson, I'd like you to meet my friend and colleague, Wang Dawei. Wang, this is Barbara Johnson, Dr. Johnson's wife, and this is his daughter, Cindy.

CINDY: Hi.

JOHNSON: Hello.

WANG: How do you do? I'm very glad to meet you. I met your husband earlier this week in our department office.

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. [To Zhou] I think he told me that you had a friend here now. He suggested we all have dinner. How about a week from Saturday?<sup>17)</sup>

ZHOU: That's October 1st, I think, and we've been invited to attend the October 1st celebration given by the U.S.-China Peoples Friendship Association.

JOHNSON: Oh, how nice. Well, how about the following Saturday?

WANG: That would be excellent for me. I really appreciate your inviting me.

ZHOU: Yes, that would be fine.

JOHNSON: Good. That's settled then.

CINDY: That's great. I'm really getting interested in China since you came to my Dad's department, and I love to listen to you talk about your country.

JOHNSON: I'll have Gerald pick you up at your apartment<sup>18)</sup> at 6:30 on Saturday, the 8th.

ZHOU: Oh, that won't be necessary. We've mastered the bus system now and it's easy to get from our place<sup>20)</sup> to yours.

JOHNSON: Fine. See you around 6:30 then.

CINDY: So long.<sup>20)</sup>

ZHOU: Good-bye. See you on Saturday the 8th, around 6:30.

WANG: Good-bye.

## NOTES

- 1) to bump into sb. — to meet sb. unexpectedly (by accident) 偶然遇到某人  
e.g. How nice to bump into you!
- 2) titles where appropriate 恰如其分的头衔  
title — showing a person's rank, occupation, status 大学里常用头衔如:  
Professor, Director of the High Altitude Physics Lab, etc.  
President 大学校长  
Chancellor (英国某些大学的) 名誉校长; (美国某些大学的) 校长  
Dean 教务长  
Provost (牛津、剑桥等大学的某些学院的) 院长; (美国某些大学的) 教务长  
Registrar 管注册者 (大学中学生注册的主管者)  
Chairman, Dept. of ... ……系主任  
Director of ... Lab ……实验室主任  
Dr. 博士 (you cannot write "Doctor" as a title. You can write: The doctor [medical doctor] performed the operation.)  
Prof. 教授
- 3) How's everything going? 一切都好吗?  
分别一段时间后, 重逢时的常用问候语。同样意思的常用语, 如:  
How's your work going?  
How's everything with you?  
How are things with you?  
How are you getting along these days?  
How're you doing?

- 4) No, I haven't had the pleasure. 不, 没此荣幸。 Or you can say: Yes, we met last week at...
- 5) How do you do? 被介绍的双方互相招呼的一句客套话。
- 6) a good deal — very much; quite a lot  
e.g. She's a good deal better today.  
He spent a good deal of money on books.
- 7) See you later. — This means any time in the future unless an agreement has been made to meet later that day.
- 8) to fill out some forms 填写表格, 也有用 to fill in a form
- 9) How are you? 问候对方健康情况的寒暄话。
- 10) It was nice meeting you.  
Nice to have met/seen you. 见到你好极了! 注意: 这是分别时所说的话。  
而 Nice to see you. 是见面时所说的话, 不要相混。
- 11) Hi.— Hello.  
Oh! (Hey!) — an expression of surprise  
c.f. Whew! — an expression of relief or exhaustion  
Ah! — an expression of sudden understanding or admiration
- 12) USCPFA — U.S.-China Peoples Friendship Association (see appendix)  
美中人民友好协会。在美国九十多个城市中都有美中人民友好协会的分支机构。
- 13) by all means — certainly 好的; 当然。这是同意别人做某件事的答语。
- 14) My God  
Jesus  
Christ  
Jesus Christ } expressions of surprise or annoyance  
(These words used to have religious connotations, but used in this way, they no longer do.)
- 15) to have (give sb.) a hard time — experience (create for sb.) difficulties, misfortunes, etc.
- 16) to make ends meet — to be able to eat and pay your bills on your budget  
收支相抵
- 17) How about...? 你以为……怎么样?
- 18) I'll have Gerald pick you up at your apartment at 6:30 on Saturday, the 8th.  
8 日星期六 6 点半我让杰拉尔德开车到你们宿舍来接你。  
e.g. pick up some groceries/books at the library  
At the next corner the bus stopped and picked up three people.  
When our TV broke, the repairman came in his truck to pick it up.
- 19) place — here means the place you live  
from our place to yours 从我们的住处到你家
- 20) So long. — Good-bye. It is used when you are leaving someone or he is leaving you.

## USEFUL EXPRESSIONS

1. Expressing surprise and pleasure in seeing someone:

- a) Hello, John. I haven't seen you for a long time.  
How's everything going?
  - b) Oh, hello, Zhou. How're you doing?
  - c) Why, hello, John! Haven't seen you for ages (a long time). What have you been doing since I saw you last?
  - d) Hi, Wang! Nice to meet you here. How are you getting on with your new work?
2. Inquiring about the health of the other person or of his family, etc.:  
(Only when you know someone well do you tell the truth.)
- a) How are you?
  - b) How's Mrs. Johnson?
  - c) How's everybody at the office?
  - d) How's the family?
3. Introducing people:
- a) Mr. Smith, allow me to introduce my good friend, Wang Dawei.
  - b) Dr. Johnson, I'd like you to meet my friend and colleague, Wang Dawei.
  - c) May I introduce Wang ... to you?  
Allow me to introduce Wang ... to you.
4. The person who has been introduced might say:
- a) Hello, Ms. Jones. (with a nod)
  - b) (I'm) glad to know you, Mr. Johnson.
  - c) (I'm) (very) glad to meet you.
  - d) (I'm) pleased to meet you.
  - e) (It's) nice to meet you.
  - f) How do you do?
5. When parting:
- a) (I'm) glad to have met you.
  - b) (It was) nice meeting you.
  - c) (I) hope we'll meet again some time.
  - d) (I) hope we can see each other again some time.
  - e) I'm glad to have met you. I hope we'll see each other again some time.
  - f) See you later.
6. Self-introduction:
- a) May I introduce myself? I'm ... (Use your family name and given name; don't use Mr., Mrs., Miss, or Ms.)
  - b) Hi. My name is ...
  - c) How do you do? My name is ...

## DIALOGUE SITUATIONS

1. How would you inquire about the health of
- a) your advisor, Dr. Gerald Johnson?
  - b) his wife?
  - c) your co-worker at the lab?
  - d) a friend's children?

2. Reply to the following:

- a) How do you do?
- b) How are you?
- c) How's everything going?
- d) How're you doing?
- e) How are you getting on with your experiment at the lab?
- f) How's the family?

3. Situations:

You're going to practise introducing people to each other. There are, of course, several ways of doing this, but we have chosen the usual introductions. Imagine you're showing a group of English-speaking visitors around your laboratory in China. As you go from department to department, you meet various colleagues whom you would like to introduce to the visitors.

4. Prepare dialogues on the following situations:

- a) Mr. Wang, a visiting scholar, meets Dr. Gerald Johnson at the department office. They greet each other and talk about the weather and their work.
- b) Mr. Wang, a research student, is introduced to Prof. and Mrs. Jones and their children, all of whom are anxious to learn more about China. They invite Wang to attend the October 1st celebration given by the USCPFA.
- c) You are having dinner with a friend in a restaurant. Another friend walks into the restaurant alone. You ask him to join you and then introduce your companion to him.
- d) You are a Chinese scientist who has recently come to the United States to do research in your field. You go to the office of Dr. Andrew B. Young, Chairman of your department, and introduce yourself to him. Dr. Young is pleased to meet you. He wants to know precisely what research you have been doing in the past few years, and what you plan to study here in the U.S. and why.