

LESSON TRANSCRIPT

Absolute Beginner S1 #1 Meeting - What's Your Name in Chinese?

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INTRODUCTION

Amber: Hey everybody, welcome to ChineseClass101.com. I'm Amber.

Victor: 大家好，我是 (Dàjiā hǎo, wǒ shì) Victor.

Amber: This is our Absolute Beginner Series, Season 1, and this is Lesson 1. The lesson is about meeting people and it's entitled, "What's Your Name?"

Victor: Yeah, the all-time favorite and necessary.

Amber: Yes, very important; high frequency for first meetings of course.

Victor: Yep, so we start out a lesson to help you make friends right away.

Amber: Yeah, and we're going to teach you how to greet someone in Chinese.

Victor: It's very important and very easy in Chinese actually; also how to tell them your name as well as asking theirs.

Amber: That's right, and this can be no small feat, you know, because Chinese names are really different than western names.

Victor: Right.

Amber: So, but we have this lesson, so there is no fear. You're going to understand it all by the end. So in this lesson, you'll learn how to greet someone and ask their name and tell them your name.

Victor: This conversation takes place on the first meeting.

Amber: Yup, and it's between two strangers meeting for the first time. But before we listen to the conversation, we just want to remind everybody about our website, ChineseClass101.com. You can go there and comment and ask questions.

Victor: Yeah.

Amber: So it's your first lesson, you're definitely going to have some questions so make sure to come visit us there at the site and leave us a comment or a question and we'll get back to you with the answers.

Victor: Definitely. We can elaborate on the content in this lesson and hope all, everybody learn.

Amber: Yeah, okay, so for now, let's listen to the conversation.

DIALOGUE

Victor: 你好。(Nǐhǎo.)

Amber: 你好，你叫什么名字？(Nǐhǎo, nǐ jiào shénme míngzì?)

Victor: 我叫张林。(Wǒ jiào Zhāng Lín.)

Amber: 我叫王小芳。(Wǒ jiào Wáng Xiǎofāng.)

Victor: 重复一次，慢速。(Chóngfù yīcì, màn sù.)

Amber: One more time, a little slower.

Victor: 你好。(Nǐhǎo.)

Amber: 你好，你叫什么名字？(Nǐhǎo, nǐ jiào shénme míngzì?)

Victor: 我叫张林。(Wǒ jiào Zhāng Lín.)

Amber: 我叫王小芳。(Wǒ jiào Wáng Xiǎofāng.)

Victor: 重复一次，加英文翻译。(Chóngfù yīcì, jiā yīngwén fānyì.)

Amber: One more time with the English.

Victor: 你好。(Nǐhǎo.)

Amber: Hello.

Amber: 你好，你叫什么名字？(Nǐhǎo, nǐ jiào shénme míngzì?)

Amber: Hello, what's your name?

Victor: 我叫张林。(Wǒ jiào Zhāng Lín.)

Amber: I'm Jung Lin.

Amber: 我叫王小芳。(Wǒ jiào Wáng Xiǎofāng.)

Amber: I'm Wang Shao Fang.

POST CONVERSATION BANTER

Amber: So what's your Chinese name, Victor?

Victor: 宁剑超 (Níng jiàn chāo)

Amber: Oh, sounds good. Sounds very handsome.

Victor: People are like wondering, whatever that means. How about you, Amber?

Amber: I am 子安 (Zǐ'ān).

Victor: Oh, okay.

Amber: It was specially chosen by my friend, although I have changed it like three or four times, but it's a fake name so I can do that.

Victor: And, of course, everyone needs a Chinese name when they are learning Chinese. No Ambers allowed.

Amber: Yeah.

Victor: Right?

Amber: Some more on that in a minute. But let's take a look at the vocabulary for this lesson first.

Victor: Yeah.

VOCAB LIST

Victor: And now, the vocab section.

Victor: 你好 (nǐhǎo)

Amber: Hello.

Victor: 你 (nǐ)

Amber: You.

Victor: 叫 (jiào)

Amber: To call.

Victor: 什么 (shénme)

Amber: What?

Victor: 名字 (míngzì)

Amber: Name.

Victor: 我 (wǒ)

Amber: I, me.

Victor: 我 (wǒ)

VOCAB AND PHRASE USAGE

Amber: Okay, Victor, so let's have a closer look at the usage for some of these words and phrases in the lesson today. So, where else to start but at the very beginning. So, that is our basic Chinese greeting, our Chinese hello, which is, of course, what we heard first in the dialog.

Victor: 你好 (nǐhǎo), 你 (nǐ) is a third tone. 好 (hǎo) is also third tone, but because tone change over here, you can hear 你 (nǐ) as the second tone; so 你好 (nǐhǎo), and it means you good.

Amber: Yeah, I mean, this greeting is really good because it actually teaches us two words in one as Victor mentions.

Victor: Yeah, 你 (nǐ) is the word for “you,” and 好 (hǎo) is the word for “good” .

Amber: Right, so I think it's pretty sweet that in Chinese when you say hello you're literally saying to the person, “you good” .

Victor: You good.

Amber: So, Victor, can you use this 你好 (nǐhǎo) anytime like indiscriminately with everyone?

Victor: Yeah, definitely, you can use 你好 (nǐhǎo) in pretty much any situation. However, there is one other version that you may hear which is for more formal settings.

Amber: Ah, like if you want to show extra respect maybe with an elderly person or someone in authority.

Victor: Exactly, and you would use the formal word for “you” which is almost the same as 你(nǐ), it’s 您 (nín).

Amber: 您 (nín) which is actually second tone, not third tone.

Victor: Right, 您 (nín), if you can tell the difference, 你 (nǐ), in Pinyin is spelled N-I, however, 您 (nín) is N-I-N.

Amber: Right. So, in a more formal setting you might hear or use 您好 (nínhǎo) instead of 你好 (nǐhǎo).

Victor: Actually 您好 (nínhǎo) is a Beijing favorite.

Amber: That’s true. You hear it a lot more in Beijing.

Victor: If you go to Beijing...

Amber: Even in taxis, et cetera.

Victor: Right. This is their local way of greeting. They never say 你好 (nǐhǎo). But if you just go to Beijing, you know, they always, no matter who you are, 您, 您, 您 (nín, nín, nín), very polite place I would say.

Amber: Yes. Okay, so next we hear a response to 你好 (nǐhǎo), which is what?

Victor: Also, 你好! (nǐhǎo!)

Amber: Right. That's very easy.

Victor: What do you know?

Amber: Right. And so, you've exchanged hellos. Now, what better would be to add next then to add your name?

Victor: Right.

Amber: So, in Chinese, to ask what is your name, literally, translated in English; I'll tell you the word order. It would be, "You called what's name?" So knowing that, let's hear it in Chinese. The first word is "you," then called what name.

Victor: 你叫什么名字? (Nǐ jiào shénme míngzì?)

Amber: Right. Okay, so we're going to break it down.

Right off, we hear the word, once again, for "you" .

Victor: 你。 (nǐ.)

Amber: So we start with "you" .

Victor: Right.

Amber: Next comes the verb for "to call" or "to be called" .

Victor: Which is 叫 (jiào) and it's fourth tone, 叫 (jiào).

Amber: So, so far we have "you called" 你叫 (nǐ jiào). Now, for the "what's

name” part, what do we hear?

Victor: The word in Chinese for “what” is 什么 (shénme); 什么 (shénme), that’s second tone and neutral tone.

Amber: Right, and this word is going to come in very handy, 什么 (shénme), in the future, obviously, as the word for “what” .

Victor: Right.

Amber: Okay, and last but not least, the word for “name” in Chinese.

Victor: 名字 (Míngzì); 名字 (míngzì), and that is second tone and neutral tone.

Amber: 名字 (Míngzì), right.

Victor: Yeah, and this can be your full name or just your first name.

Amber: So 名字 (míngzì) can refer to either.

Victor: Right.

Amber: Your full name or just your first name.

Victor: Not really your family name or last name, just the full thing or just the first name.

Amber: Right, which I would say brings us to the issue of Chinese names, Victor.

Victor: Yeah.

LESSON FOCUS

Victor: It's grammar time.

Victor: Of course, very different than English names.

Amber: Yeah, and I won't lie that it is very difficult to remember Chinese names because when you first start learning, they all kind of sound the same.

Victor: Yeah, talking about asking people to repeat their names, you probably have to do that a lot...

Amber: Yes.

Victor: ...when you first meet someone.

Amber: But the truth is it's worthwhile learning Chinese names because, number one, you can learn a lot of characters, Chinese characters that way. But they're all full of very deep meaning.

Victor: Right. They are generally made up of a surname or family name which is one, Chinese character.

Amber: Right. So the person's last name or surname is generally going to be a Chinese character. So, in

Victor's example, what's your surname, Victor?

Victor: 宁 (Níng). Yeah, that's my last name.

Amber: Just 宁 (Níng), okay, next.

Victor: Then my given name is 剑超 (jiàn chāo).

Amber: Right, so the person's given name will generally in China be made up of either one or two characters.

Victor: Right.

Amber: So in Victor's case, 剑超 (jiàn chāo) is two characters.

Victor: Yeah.

Amber: So his full name is three characters. Let's have it again, Victor, so everyone can remember. It's hard to remember Chinese names. Don't blame us.

Victor: 宁剑超 (Níng jiàn chāo)

Amber: Right.

Victor: Yeah.

Amber: And there's something that we should note, as we can hear in this example with Victor, is that in Chinese, the surname comes first.

Victor: Right.

Amber: Opposite of the west where we use our surname last.

Victor: Right, and that's because I think in China, the idea of family line is much more important.

Amber: Very important.

Victor: You are first identified by your family or clan and then your individual.

Amber: That's right.

Victor: Yeah.

Amber: Okay, so, back to our dialog. Our people had names when they introduced

themselves. So let's go to our dialog and find out what their names were.

Victor: So in the dialog in response to 你叫什么名字? (Nǐ jiào shénme míngzì?) We hear 我叫张林 (Wǒ jiào Zhāng Lín).

Victor: 我叫张林。(Wǒ jiào Zhāng Lín.)

Amber: Okay, so let's start at the beginning of the sentence; because we've already learned the word for "you" , we knew that was 你 (nǐ).

Victor: 你 (nǐ)

Amber: And now we're going to hear the word for "I" . What was it again?

Victor: Or "me" which is 我 (wǒ) and it's third tone.

Amber: Right. And then the next word we hear is the word for "to call again" . So this time it's "I am called" . When they're answering what are you called?

Victor: It's 我叫 (wǒ jiào).

Amber: Right. And then now, the clincher, we hear the person's name.

Victor: 张林 (Zhāng Lín), so 张 (Zhāng) is first tone and 林 (Lín) is second tone. And as Amber said before, some names have only two characters and this is the case. So for this person, the surname, of course, is 张 (Zhāng) and the given name is 林 (Lín).

Amber: That's right. So if you see a person's name with three characters, you know the first name is the surname. If they only have two characters in their name, you can generally know that the first name is still the surname...

Victor: Right.

Amber: ...but it's just that they only have one character as their given name.

Victor: Exactly.

Amber: Well, 张 (Zhāng) is a very commonly heard surname for sure. And you'll probably hear a lot of others that repeat a lot; so that'll make it remembering easier. For example, like, I know tons of Lee and like Chen.

Victor: Yeah, Lee, Chen, Wang.

Amber: Yes, yes, yes.

Victor: Yeah. And Leo, these are probably the biggest last names in China.

Amber: Yeah. Okay, well, our second character surname is quite common too. What was her name again, Victor?

Victor: Wang.

Amber: Yeah.

Victor: Yeah, which actually mean "king".

Amber: Right. And then her given name was...

Victor: Xiao Fang.

Amber: So Wang was second tone.

Victor: Right. Xiao is a third tone and Fang is first tone.

Amber: Right. And so, she too when she offers her name, she just simply says, like our other person did...

Victor: 我叫王小芳 (Wǒ jiào Wáng Xiǎofāng).

Amber: So I' m called Wang Xiao Fang.

Victor: Yeah. So anytime you want to say your name, you simply can use this 我叫 (wǒ jiào) and then add your name.

Amber: Your name. Okay, now, speaking of you and I as we' ve learned in the vocab section, Victor, these are pronouns and I think we should mention a few more because we want you to know how to talk about everybody else too, not just yourself.

Victor: Right. Okay, so we know the word for “I” or “me” is 我 (wǒ) and for “you” it' s 你 (nǐ). Now, here is a great news for “he, she” or “it” is the same word.

Amber: Yeah, the same word in pronunciation...

Victor: Right.

Amber: ...but the [reach in character is different.

Victor: Right.

Amber: So the word for “he’ , she” or “it” is...

Victor: 他 (tā) / 她 (tā) / 它 (tā), first tone.

Amber: Yeah.

Victor: It all sounds the same but it' s actually three different characters.

Amber: And I think it' s good because it makes it very easy to be ambiguous.

Victor: Right.

Amber: For example, if you go out for lunch with 他 (tā), no one knows if it's a man or woman.

Victor: Or it's...

Amber: Unless you wrote it down.

Victor: ...a lot of privacy there.

Amber: That's right. Okay, how about how to make a pronoun plural, how do we do that?

Victor: Yeah, that's really easy too. You just tack the word 们 on to the end of the pronoun.

Amber: Okay, so if you took 我 (wǒ), which is "I" or "me" and we want to make it into "we" or "us" you just 们 (men).

Victor: 我们 (Wǒmen)

Amber: Right.

Victor: Yeah.

Amber: And 们 (men) is actually neutral tone.

Victor: Right.

Amber: So it doesn't have much of a tone on it.

Victor: Yeah, and...

Amber: Just tack it on the end.

Victor: Yeah, and for you, the plural is 你们 (nǐmen).

Amber: Right. And for “they” or “them” ?

Victor: It’ s 他们 (tāmen)

Amber: Yes, so easy.

Victor: It’ s very easy.

Amber: I love Chinese.

Amber: Okay, now, back to Chinese names. Victor, there was something you mentioned earlier is we said that you cannot use your western name in China. It just doesn’ t really fly.

Victor: Right.

Amber: So, Victor, how do we get a Chinese name? Is there some like way we can translate our name or what?

Victor: Yeah, well, this is kind of important points. You actually will need some Chinese help for this.

Amber: Yeah, unless you wanted to end up with something that might make people laugh or chuckle inside maybe; because Chinese names are really deep.

Victor: Right.

Amber: You can’ t just randomly like open the dictionary and say...

Victor: Right.

Amber: “Oh, I want the name Turtle or something,” like it doesn’ t matter.

Victor: Definitely. Or Apple or whatever.

Amber: Yeah, yeah.

Victor: Because characters like Amber: said, you know, they all have meanings and sometimes, you know, have negative or positive connotations. And to make the name sound good, you kind of, you know, you kind of have the background information on those characters as well.

Amber: Yeah. So, a lot of times, people’ s names will come from their parents and have something to do with their parent’ s dreams for their child.

Victor: Right.

Amber: Or maybe some sort of literary references. It kind of reminds me of my friend in China who’ s named his kid Money but the dad’ s name was Cash.

Victor: It was Cash.

Amber: But thing, unfortunate thing was they weren’ t that rich...

Victor: Wow.

Amber: ...so it wasn’ t working so far.

Victor: A way to be subtle and a way to have good goals I guess.

Amber: So please get a Chinese friend to help though because it can end up kind of scary if you don’ t pick the right name.

Victor: Right.

Amber: The best way is to get a Chinese friend to help or if you don't have any Chinese friends that can help, we are your friends. You can come to ChineseClass101.com and leave a comment and we'll help you pick a name.

Victor: We'll give you a Chinese name or something.

Amber: Yes.

Victor: And like we said, you know, the names carry like some sort of dreams or goals. So sometimes you'll find that Chinese names are necessarily modest.

Amber: Oh, that's true.

Victor: Although these names stand out to be really grand, you know.

Amber: Yeah.

Victor: And that is kind of fine in China, but sometimes westerners, when you listen to the translation you feel like, "Whoa, that's not modest at all."

Amber: Yeah.

Victor: Yeah.

Amber: Yeah, a lot of the names are like powerful or strange or, you know.

Victor: Yeah.

Amber: Wisdom.

Victor: Super.

Amber: Yes.

Victor: Things like that, you know.

Amber: Supernatural.

Victor: People's dreams definitely. Okay, so we learned some good stuff today.

Amber: Yeah, let's have a little review I say. How about, what's our "hello" ?

Victor: 你好 (nǐhǎo)

Amber: And what's the word for "name" ?

Victor: 名字 (míngzì)

Amber: And how do you say, "What is your name?"

Victor: 你叫什么名字? (Nǐ jiào shénme míngzì?)

Amber: Okay, and I'll answer, I would answer by saying 我叫子安 (Wǒ jiào Zǐ'ān).

Victor: Great. And 子安 (Zǐ'ān), 我叫宁剑超。 (Wǒ jiào Níng jiàn chāo.)

OUTRO

Amber: Yeah. And so everybody, that was your very first Absolute Beginner Chinese lesson. I think it went pretty well.

Victor: Yeah, only just began though.

Amber: Yes.

Victor: Like the song.

Amber: Yeah, so stay tuned for more. Victor, might even sing some karaoke here at ChineseClass101.com.

Victor: Maybe at the very end, we' ll see. Yeah.

Amber: And until next lesson, 再见。(zàijiàn.)

Victor: 再见。(Zàijiàn.)