



Section 2



Lexical Features

Some Chinese speakers use words inappropriately as they are not aware of the differences in connotations.

“play”	“friend”
“good”	“old”
“cheap”	“class”
“live”	“send”

(Albert Weizu Zhang, 1993)



The word “**play**” is frequently used by Chinese speakers without realizing the differences in meaning the two cultures.

* “I have some good friends. We often play together.”

Chinese: “We play games. / We hang out ...”

* “My parents were not home, so I had to play with myself.”

Chinese: “I had to find something to do to kill time.”



The word “**friend**” is often used inappropriately in the phrase “*make friends with somebody*” by many Chinese learners.

* “I’ve made friends with John.”

(John is now my boy friend.)

To indicate such a relationship, a native might use other expressions such as “I’m serious about someone”, “I’m dating someone” or “We are going steady” but most Chinese have not picked up such expressions.



The meaning of “**good**” is often taken for granted by Chinese speakers.

“He’s good and rich.”

English: “He is very rich.”

Chinese: “He is a good person and also rich.”



- ❖ An “old” person by a Chinese speaker’s standard might be much younger than by a native’s standard.
- ❖ Unlike English, the word “old” also has positive connotations as there is a tradition in China to show respect for old people.
- ❖ Many Chinese have not picked up the euphemism of “senior citizens” and “elderly person”.



Many Chinese learners have not realized that “**cheap**” has negative connotations. They still use it to mean something positive. Few learners have learned to use “inexpensive”, the one with positive connotations.

“I bought a pair of shoes yesterday. They were real cheap”.

They actually mean:

“The quality is good and the price is low as well.”



How do people interpret
the “**class** of 1952”?

Chinese: Those who entered school in 1952.

English: Those who graduated in 1952.



Some Chinese learners use “**live**” to mean “stay” without realizing the difference.

Native: I'll be in Beijing for two weeks.

Chinese: * Where do you live now?

(Where are you staying now?)



When natives say:

*In the morning I **send** my children to school.*

they mean they will make sure the kids have everything and catch the school bus.

But such a phrase would mean to **take the children to school** to a Chinese.