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A Little Bit of Language Can Go a Long Way!



Lesson 2: You're Welcome!

不客气。Bú kèqì.

LESSON NOTES

Basic etiquette is a common characteristic shared by societies throughout the world, and China is no exception. In fact, the Chinese are exceptionally hospitable, and phrases of gratitude and those related are used at an extremely high frequency. During your travels in China, it is more probable you will hear, rather than use, one of the phrases for "You're welcome."

In Chinese there are multiple ways to acknowledge and respond to an expression of gratitude. Again, as you will be using thank you repeatedly, there is a good chance you will come into contact with all three variations of "You're welcome." The following phrases are all frequently used, with usage depending on the speaker's style rather than other factors such as politeness level, etc.

Bú yòng xiè. (You're welcome.)

The phrase *Bú yòng xiè*. (You're welcome.) literally means "No need for thanks." or "No need for your thanks." Looking at the components of the sentence, *bu* is a negation marker. *Yong* means need/necessary, and *xie* is thank/thanks. This phrase can be translated literally into a colloquial English expression "No need for thanks." The tone for *bù* is the 4th tone; however, when *bù* is followed by another 4th tone, the tone changes from 4th tone, the falling tone, to the 2nd tone, the rising tone.

For example:

Bùhǎo (not good) is 4th tone and 2nd tone, and as the tone following *bù* is not 4th tone, *bù* remains 4th tone.

Bú yòng (no need/not necessary) is 4th tone and 2nd tone, and as the tone following *bú* is 4th tone, the tone changes from 4th tone, the falling tone, to the 2nd tone, the rising tone.

Bú kèqì. (You're welcome.)

The phrase *Bú kèqì*. literally means "Don't be polite." This phrase also begins with *bu* (the negation marker), which precedes *kèqì* (polite). Similar to the phrase *Bú yòng xiè*. (You're welcome.), the tone for *bú* in this phrase changes from 4th tone, the falling tone, to the 2nd tone, the rising tone, as *bù* is followed by another 4th tone.

Méi shì. (It's nothing.)

Is the most casual way of expressing the notion of "You're welcome." The phrase Méi shì. literally means "It's nothing." Looking at the components of the sentence, méi is also a negation marker, while shì (thing) indicates something. When taken together in context, this phrase can be translated as "It doesn't matter." or "It's nothing."

In each of the phrases above the speaker is emphasizing that there is no need for thanks or gratitude. In fact, each phrase is a negative sentence. This provides interesting insight into how the Chinese acknowledge and respond to an expression of gratitude, as the speaker is almost discouraging the thanking party showing appreciation. The negative commonality of these phrases provides interesting insight into how the Chinese perceive gratitude.

PHRASES

Chinese Character	Pinyin	English
不用谢。	Bú yòng xiè.	You're welcome. (lit. No need for thanks.)
不客气。	Bú kèqì.	You're welcome. (lit. No polite. or Don't be polite.)
没事。	Méi shì.	You're welcome. (lit. It's nothing.)

VOCABULARY

Chinese Character	Pinyin	English
不	bù	negative prefix
用	yòng	to use
谢	xiè	thanks
客气	kèqì	polite
没	méi	negative prefix for verbs
事	shì	thing

QUICK TIP

Méi shì. (It's nothing.) in the Beijing dialect is Méi shìr. The frequent use of the noun suffix -r is distinctive characteristic of the Beijing dialect.