

Character Builder

您好學? 嗎

The basic unit of the Chinese language is the *zi* (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each *zi* has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string *zi* together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each *zi* is pronounced in one of four tones:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4th tone: 4 = diacritical mark \ pitch: 5 to 1, highest to lowest

To pronounce each *zi* below, follow its pinyin and the given tone number. Light-sound words, which have no definite pitch, carry no diacritical mark and are marked by 0.

This week: Words about age

代

Putonghua pronunciation: *dai4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *doi6*

Meaning: represent, replace, substitute, generation

代 (亻 = 人 *ren2*, people + 弋 *yi4*, move) = 代替 (*dai4 ti4* = replace-substitute), 代表 (*dai4 biao3* = represent-express = represent/representative), 代勞 (*dai4 lao2* = for-labour) = execute work/chore for another. Purchaser pays 代價 (*dai4 jia4* = represent-cost = cost). Cryptologist cracks 代碼 (*dai4 ma3* = represent-code = codes),

時代 (*shi2 dai4* = time-age/era/epoch) = historical period: 古代 (*gu3 dai4* = ancient-times), 現代 (*xian4 dai4* = modern-times), 朝代 (*chao2 dai4* = dynasty's-ruling-period). 換代 (*huan4 dai4* = change-generation) means replacement of old dynasty/generation/technology by new.

老一代 (*lao3 yi1 dai4* = old-one-generation = older generation) and 新一代 (*xin1 yi1 dai4* = new-one-generation = younger generation) have 代溝 (*dai4 gou1* = generation-gap).

by Diana Yue