

Character Builder 您好嗎？

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 high-speed trains

速

(radical 辶 = boat)

Putonghua pronunciation: *su4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chuk1*

Meanings: speed, high speed

鐵路 (*tie3 lu4* = iron-road = railway) = 列車 (*lie4 che1* = row/line-car/carriage = train): 快列 (*kuai4 lie4* = fast/non-stop/express~ train), 慢列 (*man4 lie4* = slow~train).

After Japan's 新幹線 (*xin1 gan4 xian4* = new~trunk~line = Shinkansen bullet-train), France's 高速列車 (*gao1 su4 lie4 che1* = high~speed~train = Train de Grande Vitesse, TGV), Germany's 磁浮 (*ci2 fu2* = magnetic~float = magnetic levitation = Maglev) train, China builds 中國高速鐵路 (*Zhong1 Guo2 gao1 su4 tie3 lu4* = Middle~Kingdom-high-speed-iron-road = China Railway High-Speed, CRH).

CRH's 和諧號 (*he2 xie2 hao4* = blend~harmony~name = "Harmony"-trains) are 電動車組 (*dian4 dong4 che1 zu3* = electrically~propelled~carriage~group = electric multiple-unit trains) with 速度 (*su4~du4* = speed-degree = speed) of 350km/hour.

by Diana Yue