

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 New Year resolutions

破

Putonghua pronunciation: *po4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *poh3*

Meanings: break, defeat

破 (石 *shi2*, stone + 皮 *pi2*, skin) = scratch/break/broken: 破舊 (*po4 jiu4* = broken/torn-old) clothes/furniture, 破碎 (*po4 sui4* = broken-cracked) marriage/heart. Warmongers 破壞 (*po4 huai4* = break-ruin) peace. Once rich 破落戶 (*po4 luo4 hu4* = broken-down~household = fallen family) now 撿破爛 (*jian3 po4 lan4* = pick-broken-torn = collect rubbish/castaways).

Friendship 破裂 (*po4 lie4* = break-crack = breaks down), friends 抓破臉 (*zhua1 po4 lian3* = scratch-break~countenance = drop pretense, attack each other), 破口大罵 (*po4 kou3 da4 ma4* = break-mouth~big-rebuke = shout abuses).

老牛破車 (*lao3 niu2 po4 che1* = old-ox~broken~cart) describes old China's poverty/backwardness. Reformers advocate 破除 (*po4 chu2* = break-expel) superstitions, 打破 (*da3 po4* = beat-break = crush) traditions.

by Diana Yue