

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 younger generation



Putonghua pronunciation: *shao 3, shao 4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *siu 2, siu 3*

Meanings: small, young

Quantitatively, 少 (*shao3*) means = few/short of. Age-wise, 少 (*shao4*) means young/junior: 少年時代 (*shao4 nian2 shi2 dai4* = young-years/age-time-generation = teenage), 少女 (*shao4 nu3* = teenage-girls), 老夫少妻 (*lao3 fu1 shao4 qi1* = old-husband-young-wife). 少爺 (*shao4 ye2* = young-sire = young master)'s wife is 少奶奶 (*shao4 nai3 nai0* = young-madam-madam = young mistress). 少年人 (*shao4 nian2 ren2* = teenage-persons) are usually 少不更事 (*shao4 bu4 geng1 shi4* = young-not-experience-things = young hence unexposed/inexperienced), rarely 年少老成 (*nian2 shao4 lao3 cheng2* = year/age-young-old-ripe = young but mature-mannered, mature-minded).

少壯派 (*shao4 zhuang4 pai4* = young-strong-faction = rising second generation) challenges 當權派 (*dang1 quan2 pai4* = manage-power-faction = power-wielders) in power struggle.

by Diana Yue