

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 residency



Putonghua pronunciation: *sheng1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *saang1*

Meanings: birth, give birth, father, life, lively, develop, raw

生 (picturing grass growing on land) means live/life: 出生 (*chu1 sheng1* = out-born = is born), 生長 (*sheng1 zhang3* = live-grow = grow), 生日 (*sheng1 ri4* = birth-day).

WWII-survivor 一生吃苦 (*yi1 sheng1 chi1 ku3* = one-life-eat-bitterness = had it hard his whole life), complains: “生不逢時!” (*sheng1 bu4 feng2 shi2* = born-no-meet-time = “Born into the wrong era!”)

土生土長 (*tu3 sheng1 tu3 zhang3* = earth/land-born-earth/land-grow) describes person born and raised indigenously. 謀生 (*mou2 sheng1* = plan/seek~livelihood) = work. 生兒育女 (*sheng1 er2 yu4 nü3* = give-birth~son~raise~daughter) = have kids, raise family. Person who enjoys 生活 (*sheng1 huo2* = born-live = living) appreciates meaning of 生命 (*sheng1 ming4* = living-life = life).

by Diana Yue