

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 1949 Liberation

解

Putonghua pronunciation: *jie3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gaai6*

Meanings: link, untie, separate, solve, break, dissect, free, relieve

解 means link/untie/break-up: 解謎 (*jie3 mi2* = break/solve-puzzle/mystery), 解碼 (*jie3 ma3* = break/de-code), 溶解 (*rong2 jie3* = melt-dissolve). Gang 解體 (*jie3 ti3* = break-up-body = disbands). Policeman 押解 (*ya1 jie3* = imprison-escort = escorts) convict. Boss 解聘 (*jie3 ping4* = dismiss-employ = sacks) employee. 解剖學 (*jie3 pou1 xue2* = dissect-open-study) = anatomy.

Dumb student 大惑不解 (*da4 huo4 bu4 jie3* = big-delusion-not-understand = is greatly puzzled). Teacher 解釋 (*jie3 shi1* = solve-release = explains): “了解 (*liao3 jie3* = know-link = understand) problem, then 解決 (*jie3 jue2* = untie-decide = solve) it.”

Opponents 解除武裝 (*jie3 chu2 wu3 zhuang1* = untie-take-off-military-outfit/gear = are disarmed). China celebrates 解放 (*jie3 fang4* = un-bound-free = Liberation).

by Diana Yue