

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 disabled people

Putonghua pronunciation: *ya3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *a2*

Meanings: mute

We use 口 (*kou3* = 嘴 *zui3*, mouth), 嘴唇 (*zui3 chun2* = mouth-lips = lips), 舌頭 (*she2 tou2* = tongue-head = tongue), 聲帶 (*sheng1 dai4* = sound-belt = vocal cords) to speak. 語言治療師 (*yu3 yan2 zhi4 liao2 shi1* = speech-words-heal-cure-master) = speech therapist.

啞巴 (*ya3 ba1* = mute-suffix) = 啞子 (*ya3-zi0* = mute-son) = mute person. 天聾地啞 (*tian1 long2 di4 ya3* = heaven-deaf-earth-mute) means natural deafness makes person mute. Deaf-mutes communicate by 手語 (*shou3 yu3* = hand-speech = sign language), 面部表情 (*mian4 bu4 biao3 qing2* = face-part-express-emotion = facial expressions).

啞劇 (*ya3 ju2* = mute-drama) = mime. Interrogation/embarrassment renders person 啞口無言 (*ya3 kou3 wu2 yan2* = mute-mouth-no-speech = speechless).