

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 Achilles



Putonghua pronunciation: *fa2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *fat6*

Meanings: hack, fell, cut down, chop, kill
invade, attack

Ideogram 伐 shows 亻 (= 人 ren2, person) hacked by 戈 (*ge1*, lance). 砍伐 (*kan3 fa2* = chop~hack) = hacking trees/people. 伐木丁丁 (*fa2 mu4 zheng1 zheng1* = chop~wood/trees~“zheng”~“zheng”) describes sound of woodsman’s axe attacking trees.

In Chinese history, powerful 秦 (*Qin2*) 征伐 (*zheng1 fa2* = march~invade = launched military expeditions against) 六國 (*liu4 guo2* = six~other-states), wiped them out. Historians 口誅筆伐 (*kou3 zhu1 bi3 fa2* = mouth~condemn~pen~attack = condemned it in speech and writing).

Homer described Greek queen 海倫 (*Hai3 Lun2* = “Helen”-transliterated)’s elopement with Trojan prince 巴里斯 (*Ba1 Li3 Si1* = “Paris”-transliterated). Greeks 攻伐 (*gong1 fa2* = attacked~invaded) Troy. On battlefield, 殺伐盈耳 (*sha1 fa2 ying2 er3* = kill~hack~fill~ears = war cries resounded).

by Diana Yue