

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 hunting

殺

Putonghua pronunciation: *sha1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *saat3*

Meanings: take life, kill, slaughter

殺 (radical 殸 *shu1*, killing-weapon) means 殺害 (*sha1 hai4* = 殺死 *sha2 si3* = kill~harm-to-death), 殺戮 (*sha1 lu4* = kill~slaughter). 自殺 (*zi4 sha1* = self-kill) = suicide, 他殺 (*ta1 sha1* = he/other~kill) = manslaughter. 大殺傷武器 (*da4 sha1 shang1 wu3 qi4* = big~kill~harm~military~instrument) = weapons of mass destruction.

Buddhists denounce 殺生 (*sha1 sheng1* = killing-of-life), but death~penalty e.g. 殺頭 (*sha1 tou2* = kill~head = beheading/decapitation) upholds principle of 殺人填命 (*sha1 ren2 tian2 ming4* = kill~person~fill/re-fill~life = killer/murderer pays with life).

Knife-wielder looks 殺氣騰騰 (*sha1 qi4 teng2 teng2* = kill~air~rise-rise = terribly menacing). “天殺的!” (*tian1 sha1 de0* = Heaven~kill~'s) is angry curse meaning “God damn it!”/“goddammit!” or slangy adjective “cursed”/“goddam”.

by Diana Yue