

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 translation

媒

(radical 女 nu3 = woman)

Putonghua pronunciation: *mei 2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *mooi 4*

Meanings: go-between, medium, media

媒 = go-between: 媒人 (*mei2 ren2* = matchmaking~person), 媒婆 (*mei2 po2* = matchmaker~grandma = woman matchmaker). In old China 父母之命 (*fu4 mu3 zhi1 ming4* = father~mother~'s~order), 媒妁之言 (*mei2 shuo4 zhi1 yan2* = man's~matchmaker~woman's~matchmaker~'s~words) decided son's/daughter's choice of spouse. 神媒 (*shen2 mei2* = gods/ medium) communicate between gods/ghosts and humans.

疾病媒介 (*ji2 bing4 mei2 jie4* = disease~illness~medium~between) = disease vector. 傳播媒介 (*chuan2 bo4 mei2 jie4* = communicate~broadcast~media) = communications media e.g. newspapers/magazines/films. Television is 冷媒體 (*leng3 mei2 ti3* = cold~medium~body = cool medium). 傳媒大亨 (*chuan2 mei2 da4 heng3* = communications~media~big~success) = media tycoon e.g. Murdoch.

Translation is compared to 鳥媒 (*niao3 mei2* = bird~medium = bird-bait for attracting/trapping other birds).