

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: *zu2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *juk1*

Meanings: foot, feet

足 = 腳 (*jiao3*, foot/feet): 足跡 (*zu2 zhi1* = foot~prints), 足球 (*zu2 qiu2* = foot~ball), 赤腳 (*chi4 jiao3* = bare~footed), 腳跟 (*jiao3 gen1* = foot~heel = heel). Brothers/buddies/colleagues call each other 手足 (*shou3 zu2* = hands-and~feet).

Feet/legs' movements (radical 足) include 跳 (*tiao4*, jump), 踢 (*ti4*, kick), 跪 (*gui4*, kneel). 手舞足蹈 (*shou3 wu3 zu2 dao3* = hands~wave~feet~dance) describes overwhelmed person's ecstatic gestures.

Homer described death of Achilles: Achilles' body was 刀槍不入 (*dao1 qiang1 bu4 ru4* = knife~spear~no~enter = impenetrable by weapons), but a fatal arrow shot into Achilles' heel, his 唯一弱點 (*wei2 yi1 ruo4 dian3* = only~soft/fatal~spot). 練門 (*lian4 men2* = practice~door/hole/leak = vulnerable/weak spot) in Chinese kungfu means roughly the same.

by Diana Yue