

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 shopping malls



Putonghua pronunciation: *mai3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *maai5*

Meanings: buy

買, 賣 (*mai4*, sell), 貨 (*huo4*, commodity) all have radical 貝 (*bei4*, seashell = money). 買方 (*mai3 fang1* = buy-side/party = buyer) purchases 貨物 (*huo4 wu4* = commodity-thing = commodities) from 賣方 (*mai4 fang1* = sell-side/party = seller).

Businessmen 做買賣 (*zuo4 mai3 mai4* = do-buy-sell = make deals/transactions). Shoppers 買東西 (*mai3 dong1 xi3* = buy-east-west = buy things). Big sales offer “買一送一!” (*mai3 yi1 song4 yi1* = buy-one-give-one = “Buy one, get one free!”)

Men go out to 買醉 (*mai3 zui4* = buy~drunken = buy drinks, get drunk), 買笑 (*mai3 xiao4* = buy~smile = pay whores for sex). 買官 (*mai3 guan1* = buy~bureaucrat = paying graft to obtain official appointment) is corrupt practice.

by Diana Yue