

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 auctions

Putonghua pronunciation: *mai4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *maai6*

Meanings: sell, betray

買賣 (*mai3 mai4* = buy~sell) = business deal/transaction. Brokers 買入 (*mai3 ru4* = buy-in), 賣出 (*mai4 chu1* = sell-out) stocks.

Good employee/friend 賣力 (*mai4 li4* = sell-strength = enthusiastically render effort/help). Prostitutes 賣肉 (*mai4 rou4* = sell-flesh = sell their bodies). 出賣 (*chu1 mai4* = out-sell) = betray. Traitor 賣國求榮 (*mai4 guo2 qiu2 rong2* = sell-country~seek-glory = betrays country for fame/fortune).

拍賣 (*pai1 mai4* = bang-sell = auctioning)'s principle is 價高者得 (*jia4 gao1 zhe3 de2* = price-high~person~take/receive = highest bidder gets the thing). Item has 底價 (*di3 jia4* = bottom-price). Bidders 提價 (*ti2 jia4* = raise~price). Auctioneer announces 賣價 (*mai4 jia4* = selling~price). Nothing is 賤賣 (*jian4 mai4* = cheaply~sold).

by Diana Yue