

# 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.

## This week: Words about race

語

Pronunciation: *yu* (Putonghua, 3<sup>rd</sup> tone), *yue* (Cantonese, 5<sup>th</sup> tone)

Basic meaning: language

語 = 語言 (*yu yan*, speech-words = 語文 *yu wen*, speech-writing = language) has 語音 (*yu yin* = speech-sounds), 語法 (*yu fa* = language-rules = grammar), 語意 (*yu yi* = words' meaning). 文字 (*wen zi* = inscription-characters) = writing script.

China achieved 書同文 (*shu tong wen* = book/writing-same-inscription = unified writing script) two millennia ago. Many 方言 (*fang yan* = 地方語言, *di fang yu yan* = land-square/place-speech-words = regional dialects) are spoken. 漢語 (*Han yu* = Han-Chinese) is now the 共同語 (*gong tong yu* = share-same-language = common language).

外語 (*wai yu* = outside-speech) = foreign languages. 鳥語 (*niao yu* = bird-words) means birdsong. 語塞 (*yu sai* = word-blocked/stuck) means dumbfounded.

by Diana Yue