

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 reporters

者

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhe3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *je2*

Meanings: person linked to something

“Adjective/verb + 者” indicates person’s quality/action: 老者 (*lao3 zhe3* = old~ster), 傷者 (*shang1 zhe3* = wounded~persons), 偷渡者 (steal-cross~person = illegal immigrant), 死者 (*si3 zhe3* = dead~people = the dead).

Missionary preaches 信者得救 (*xin4 zhe3 de2 jiu4* = believe~person~get~saved = salvation to believers). Evolutionist preaches 適者生存 (*shi1 zhe3 sheng1 chuan2* = suitable~ person~live~remain = survival of the fittest): 強者 (*qiang2 zhe3* = strong~ones/species) conquers 弱者 (*ruo4 zhe3* = weak~ones/species). 讀者 (*du2 zhe3* = read~ers) applaud (記者 *ji4 zhe3* = record~person = journalist)’s scoop on public figure’s covered-up wrongdoings. Exposure makes 親者痛仇者快 (*qin1 zhe3 tong4 chou2 zhe3 kuai2* = close/dear~ones~grieve~opponent/enemy~ones~cheer, i.e. it saddens his friends but excites/amuses his enemies).

by Diana Yue