

Character Builder 您好學？

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 Han people

語

Putonghua pronunciation: *yǔ3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yue5*

Meaning: language, speech, word, linguistic

語 (radical 言 *yan2*, word) means 語言 (*yǔ3 yan2*, speech-words = 語文 *yǔ3 wen2*, speech-writing-script = language), having 語音 (*yǔ3 yin1* = speech-sounds), 語法 (*yǔ3 fa3* = language-rules = grammar), 語意 (*yǔ3 yi4* = linguistic-meaning).

China has many 地方語言 (*di4 fang1 yǔ3 yan2* = land-region-language = 方言 *fang1 yan2* = regional-dialects), but 共同語 (*gong4 tong2 yǔ3* = shared-same-language = common language = lingua franca) is 漢語 (*Han4 yǔ3* = Han-language, i.e. Chinese) using 漢字 (*Han4 zi4* = Han-Chinese-characters) as writing script.

Universities teach 古代漢語 (*gu3 dai4 Han4 yǔ3* = ancient-times-Han-language = classical Chinese), 現代漢語 (*xian4 dai4 Han4 yǔ3* = present-times-Han-language = modern Chinese), 外語 (*wai4 yǔ3* = foreign-languages).

by Diana Yue