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 electricity

器 Putonghua pronunciation: qi4
Cantonese pronunciation: hei3
Meaning: ware, utensil, instrument, appliance

器 (showing four 口 kou3, mouths/openings) means 器具 (qi4 jü4 = utensil-instrument): 容器 (rong2 qi4 = container-utensil), 兵器 (bing1 qi4 = army-instruments = weapons), 官 (qi4 guan1 = utensil-commander = body organs), 生殖器 (sheng1 zhi2 qi4 = born-multiply-organ = male/female reproductive organ).

Archeologists study 青铜器 (qing1 tong2 qi4 = blue-green-bronze-utensil/container = ancient bronzes), 陶瓷器 (tao2 ci2 qi4 = clay-porcelain-ware = ceramics). 不成器 (bu4 cheng2 qi4 = un-successful-ware) means spoilt/sub-standard pottery/porcelain product or failed person.

家用電器 (jia1 yong4 dian4 qi4 = home-used-electric-appliances) include 電爐 (dian4 lu2 = electric-stove/heater), 電冰箱 (dian4 bing1 xiang1 = electric-ice-box = refrigerator), 電扇 (dian4 shan4 = electric-fan), 電飯煲 (dian4 fan4 bao1 = electric-rice-cooker).

by Diana Yue