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 tenants

客 Putonghua pronunciation: ke4
Cantonese pronunciation: haak3
Meaning: away from home, guest, visitor, stranger, person engaged in activity

客 (radical = mian2, house) = 客人 (ke4 ren2 = guest/visiting-person). 租客 (zu1 ke4 = rent-guest/person) = tenant. 乘客 (cheng2 ke4 = ride-guest = passengers), 顧客 (gu4 ke4 = look-guest = customers/clients), 住客 (zhu4 ke4 = residing-guests/persons) expect 客氣 (ke4 qi4 = guest-air/style = polite) service. 客觀 (ke4 guan1 = guest’s-view) = objective.

酒客 (jiu3 ke4 = liquor-person) = drinker/booser in pub. 嫲客 (piao2 ke4 = wencher) visits brothels. 政客 (zheng4 ke4 = politicians) pays 脫客 (shuo1 ke4 = say/persuade-person = lobbyists), 刺客 (ci4 ke4 = stab-person = assassins).

客家 (ke4 jia1 = guest-family = Hakka) people’s ancestors migrated here from northern China. Old-age expatriate 客死異鄉 (ke4 si3 yi4 xiang1 = away-from-home-dies-in-foreign-land).

by Diana Yue