Character Builder

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 accidents

Putonghua pronunciation: zhuang4
Cantonese pronunciation: jong6
Meaning: hit, collide, clash, strike, bump, shove, knock, charge, crash

撞 (radical 手 = shou3, hand) means 撞擊 (zhuang4 ji1 = collide-hit), 衝撞 (chong1 zhuang4 = charge-hit), 撞期 (zhuang4 qil = clashing-period/date), 撞色 (zhuang4 se1 = clashing-colors), Traveler 撞上 (zhuang4 shang4 = hits-on = comes across) monastery’s year-end 撞鐘 (zhuang4 zhong1 = ram-against-bell = bell-striking/sounding) ceremony, 撞見 (zhuang4 jian4 = bumps-into-sees) friend.

Rude child 頓撞 (ding3 zhuang4 = bump-with-head-hit = talks back at) parent, Spy 撞破 (zhuang4 po4 = crashes-breaks/fouls) conspiracy. Grifters 招搖撞騙 (zhao1 yao2 zhuang4 pian4 = flaunt-swagger-hit/try-luck-swindle = con/cheat people), 撞車 (zhuang4 che1 = hit-car) = car crash. Driver 撞倒 (zhuang4 dao4 = knocks-over/down) pedestrian, yells Cantonese expression “撞鬼” (zhuang4 gui3 = Cantonese “jong6 gwai2” = hit-ghost = “dammit!”

by Diana Yue