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 hungry stomach

Putonghua pronunciation: qiang3
Cantonese pronunciation: cheung2
Meaning: snatch, seize, grab, rob, rush, forestall

搶 (radical 手 = shou3, hand + 倉 cang1, barn, i.e. robbing grains) means 搶奪 (qiang3 duo2 = snatch-seize), 搶先 (qiang3 xian1 = rush-forward-to-seize/handle): 搶購 (qiang3 gou4 = rush-to-buy) discount items, 搶救 (qiang3 jiu4 = rush-to-rescue) accident victim.

Workers 搶修 (qiang3 xiu1 = rush-to-repair) collapsed bridge. Marines 搶灘 (qiang3 tan1 = rush-onto-to-occupy-beach). 搶手袋 (qiang3 shou3 dai4 = snatching-hand-bag) is 搶劫 (qiang3 jie2 = snatch-rob = open robbery).

Beggar’s bread got 搶走 (qiang3 zou3 = snatched-away), 呼天搶地 (hu1 tian1 qiang3 di4 = call-heaven-snatch-earth = wails loudly). Aggressive guys win in 搶食世界 (qiang3 shi2 shi4 jie4 = Cantonese cheung2 sik6 sai3 gaa3 = snatch-eat-world-territory = Cantonese expression meaning “competitive world ruled by jungle law”).

by Diana Yue