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 trains

拖
Putonghua pronunciation: tuo1
Cantonese pronunciation: toh1
Meaning: pull, drag, trawl, hang

拖 (radical 手 = hand shou3, hand) means pull/drag: 拖車 (tuo1 che1 = pull-cart or trailer), 拖船 (tuo1 chuan2 = tow-boat), 拖網漁船 (tuo1 wang3 yu2 chuan2 = trawl-net-fishing-boat = trawler).
拖把 (tuo1 ba3 = drag-handle) = mop. Lovers 手拖手 (shou3 tuo1 shou3 = hand-drag-hand = go hand-in-hand).

Lazy executives 拖長 (tuo1 chang2 = drag-long = prolong) project, 拖慢 (tuo1 man4 = drag-slow = slackens) progress, 拖欠 (tuo1 qian4 = drag-owe = keeps owing) workers' wages, 拖累 (tuo1 lei4 = drag-harm = drags down) company.

Train has 機車 (ji1 che1 = machine-car = locomotive/engine) and 拖卡 (tuo1 ka3 = drag-“car”-transliterated = coaches/trailers).
High-speed trains 拖動 (tuo1 dong4 = pull-move = drives/speeds up) country’s economy.

by Diana Yue