Character Builder 您好嗎？攻

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 World War II

Putonghua pronunciation: gong1
Cantonese pronunciation: gung1
Meaning: attack, assail, assault, offensive

攻 (gong1, engineering + 支 pu1, execute) means conduct work/efforts: 攻勢 (gong1 shi4 = attack-force = offensive), 攻打 (gong1 da3 = attack-hit/storm). Slanderer launches 人身攻擊 (ren2 shen1 gong1 ji1 = human-body-offensive-attack = personal attacks), but rumours 不攻自破 (bu4 gong1 zi4 po4 = no-attack-self-break = disintegrate before denial/rebuttal is made).

攻讀 (gong1 du2 = try-hard-read) = study diligently. 以毒攻毒 (yi3 du2 gong1 du2 = with-poison/venom-attack-poison/venom) describes doctor’s/strategist’s use of venom/malice against illness/attack.

Invaders 進攻 (jin4 gong1 = advance-on-attack) neighbors, 攻無不克 (gong1 wu2 bu4 ke1 = attack-no-not-conquer = always score victories). Invaded countries form 攻守同盟 (gong1 shou3 tong2 meng2 = offensive-defensive-same-pact = coalition/alliance), 反 攻 (fan3 gong1 = launch counter-attack).

by Diana Yue