Character Builder 您好嘢？

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 eggs

下

Putonghua pronunciation: xia4
Cantonese pronunciation: ha6
Meanings: below, low, under, drop, send

下 (line with something underneath) means low/below/after/downward: 下面 (xia4 mian4 = down-face = under/below), 下降 (xia4 jiang4 = downward-fall/descend), 下等 (xia4 liu2 = low-class). Sky 下雨 (xia4 yu3 = fall-rain = is raining), traveler 留下 (liu2 xia4 = remains/stays put). Penitent 下跪 (xia4 gui4 = down-kneel = kneels), 下淚 (xia4 lei4 = down-tears = weeps).

China’s 上山下鄉 (shang4 shan1 xia4 xiang1 = go-up-hill-go-down-countryside = Down to the Countryside) Movement meant urban youths’ massive rural migration. 下崗 (xia4 gang3 = descend-post) = quit work-post.

Woman 下 (dan4 xia4 = birth-drop = gives birth to) baby. 母雞下蛋 (mu3 ji1 xia4 dan4 = mother-chicken-drop-egg) = hen lays egg(s). Angry world watch drones 下彈 (xia4 dan4 = drop-bombs).

by Diana Yue