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 new-born babies

甜蜜 Putonghua pronunciation: tian2 Cantonese pronunciation: tim4
Meaning: sweet

甜 (舌 she2, tongue) means 甘甜 (gan1 tian2 = pleasantly/ soothingly-sweet): 嗜甜 (shi4 tian2 = fond-of-sweets), 甜品 (tian2 pin3 = sweet-things/desserts), 心甜 (xin1 tian2 = heart-feeling-sweet/pleased), 甜美 (tian2 mei3 = sweet-pretty) face/voice/smile.

甜酸苦辣 (tian2 suan1 ku3 la4 = sweet-sour-bitter-spicy-hot) describes multiple tastes/experiences. Cheats get 甜头 (tian2 tou2 = sweet-tip/head = advantages) by using 甜言蜜語 (tian2 yan2 mi4 yu3 = sweet-sayings-honeyed-words). PRC slogan 想苦思甜 (yi1 ku3 si1 tian2 = remember-bitter-think/reflect-sweet) means “Remember difficult past, treasure today’s success/happiness”.

Baby is Dad’s 甜心 (tian2 xin1 = sweet-heart/honey/darling), 甜甜一笑 (tian2 tian2 yi1 xiao4 = sweetly-sweetly-one-smile = a sweet smile) makes Dad feel 甜絲絲 (tian2 si1 si1 = sweet-silk-thread-silk-thread = heart sweetly/pleasantly tugged/tickled).

by Diana Yue