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 acting

台 (tai2)
Putonghua pronunciation: tai2
Cantonese pronunciation: toi4
Meanings: platform, stage, terrace

台 = raised flat structure: 陽台 (yang2 tai2 = sun-platform = verandah), 平台 (ping2 tai2 = flat-stage = platform), 講台 (jiang3 tai2 = talk/lecturing-stage). 亭台樓閣 (ting2 tai2 lou2 ge2 = pavilions-terraces-storeyed-buildings-attics) collectively means Chinese architecture. 月台 (yue4 tai3 = moon-stage) = railway platform. 斷頭台 (duan4 tou2 tai2 = break-head-stage) = execution/guillotine-platform. 電視台 (dian4 shi4 tai2 = electric-vision-stage) = television station/channel.

舞台 (wu3 tai2 = dance-stage) = 戲台 (xi4 tai2 = drama-stage) = performing stage. Actors 上台 (shang4 tai2 = ascend-stage), perform 話劇 (hua4 ju2 = speech-drama = plays), deliver 台詞 (tai2 ci2 = stage-words = dialogues).

下台 (xia4 tai2 = descend-stage) describes performer leaving stage or politician stepping down.

by Diana Yue