Character Builder

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 donations

謝
Putonghua pronunciation: xie4
Cantonese pronunciation: je6
Meanings: wither, decline, wane, thank

謝 (radical 言 yan2, words/speech) means thank. Grateful person says “謝謝!” (xie4 xie0 = “Thanks!”) Prize-winner 致謝詞 (zhi4 xie4 ci2 = gives-thanks-you-speech = vote of thanks).

Christian’s prayer begins with 感謝天父 (gan3 xie4 tian1 fu4 = feel-thank-heaven-father = Thank you heavenly father).

Performer 謝幕 (xie4 mo4 = thank-curtain = takes curtain calls).

Performing 謝師宴 (xie4 shi1 yan4 = thank-teachers-banquet = dinner in honor of teachers), graduates say: 謝天謝地 (xie4 tian1 xie4 di4 = thank-heaven-thank-earth = Thank heavens) we graduated!

Recipient of great favor/gift says to benefactor: 大恩不言謝 (da4 en1 bu4 yan2 xie4 = great-kindness-no-talk/mention-thanks), i.e. Instead of voicing my gratitude to you in empty words, I will show it by action.

by Diana Yue