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 Chinese New Year lucky money

包 Putonghua pronunciation: bao1
Cantonese pronunciation: baaau1
Meanings: wrap, packet, package, contain, bun

包 = 包圍 (bao1 wei2 = wrap/contain-surround), 包括 (bao1 kuo4 = contain-include/comprise). 包容 (bao1 rong2 = wrap-contain) = tolerate/tolerant. 包袱 (bao1 fu2 = wrap-cloth/bundle) also means burden. 叉燒包 (cha1 shao1 bao1 = fork-burn/roast-bun) is steamed bun with barbecued pork filling. 打包 (da3 bao1 = form-package) means pack leftovers/takeaways.

包辦 (bao1 ban4 = wrap-handle) = provide complete service. 包機 (bao1 ji1 = exclusive-book-airplane) = chartered flight. “包在我身上!” (bao1 zai4 wo3 shen1 shang4 = exclusive-on-my-body-over) = “I'll take care of everything!”

紅包 (hong2 bao1 = red-packet) = Cantonese 利是 (lei6 si6 = profit-yes) is “lucky money” in red envelop given as blessing. 收紅包 (shou1 hong2 bao1 = receive-red-packet) = taking graft/bribes.

by Diana Yue