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 reporters

者
Putonghua pronunciation: zhe3
Cantonese pronunciation: je2
Meanings: person linked to something

“Adjective/verb + 者” indicates person’s quality/action: 老者 (lao3 zhe3 = old-ster), 傷者 (shang1 zhe3 = wounded-persons), 偷渡者 (steal-cross-person = illegal immigrant), 死者 (si3 zhe3 = dead-people = the dead).

Missionary preaches 信者得救 (xin4 zhe3 de2 jiu4 = belive-person-get-saved = salvation to believers). Evolutionist preaches 適者生存 (shi1 zhe3 sheng1 chuan2 = suitable-person-live-remain = survival of the fittest): 強者 (qiang2 zhe3 = strong-ones/species) conquers 弱者 (ruo4 zhe3 = weak-ones/species).

讀者 (du2 zhe3 = read-ers) applaud (記者 jji4 zhe3 = record-person = journalist)'s scoop on public figure’s covered-up wrongdoings. Exposure makes 親者痛仇者快 (qin1 zhe3 tong4 chou2 zhe3 kuai2 = close/dear-ones-grieve-opponent/enemy-ones-cheer, i.e. it saddens his friends but excites/amuses his enemies).

by Diana Yue