

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 diplomatic relations

友

Putonghua pronunciation: *you3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *you5*

Meanings: friend, befriend

友 = 友人 (*you3 ren2* = friend-person) = 朋友 (*peng2 you3* = companion~friend) = friend. 至親好友 (*zhi4 qin1 hao3 you3* = extreme~dear~good~friends) means one's family, close relatives and friends.

女朋友 (*nü3 peng2 you3* = female~friend) = girlfriend, 男朋友 (*nan2 peng2 you3* = male~friend) = boyfriend. However, 老朋友 (*lao3 peng2 you3* = old~companion~friend) means long-time familiar/endeared friend/chum, regardless of age/sex, free of romance.

Countries develop 友誼 (*you3 yi2* = friend~good-relation = friendships), become 友邦 (*you3 bang1* = friendly~state = nations on good terms with each other), establish 邦交 (*bang1 jiao1* = states'~cross/friendship = diplomatic relations), exchange 大使 (*da4 shi4* = big~envoy = ambassadors), form alliance, become 盟友 (*meng2 you3* = alliance~friend = allies).

by Diana Yue