

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 political parties

Putonghua pronunciation: *fa2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *fat6*

Meanings: hack, fell, cut down, chop, kill, attack

伐 (亻 = 人 *ren2*, person + 戈 *ge1*, lance) shows person beheaded/killed by knife/lance. 砍伐 (*kan3 fa2* = chop~hack) = chopping trunks of humans/trees. Lumberjacks 伐木 (*fa2 mu4* = chop~ wood = fell trees). Pioneers 伐竹取道 (*fa2 zhu1 qu3 dao4* = chop~bamboos~obtain~path = clear bamboo trees to make walking path).

In warfare, 伐 means military attack launched by stronger/righteous side against enemy. Army 征伐 (*zheng1 fa2* = march~attack) rebels: 遠征 (*yuan3 zheng1* = goes on long march) to 討伐 (*tao3 fa2* = denounce~attack = attack/punish) rebels. 殺伐盈耳 (*sha1 fa2 ying2 er3* = kill~hack~fill~ears) describes battlefield resounding with war cries.

口誅筆伐 (*kou3 zhu1 bi3 fa2* = mouth~condemn~pen~attack) means launching publicity campaign to condemn someone's behavior.