Written Chinse isn't phonetic – the writing doesn't indicate sound in the way that our alphabet does.

Whilst Chinese people write their language with characters, the phonetic system pinyin is increasingly used by them – mainly to use modern technologies. It's also a helpful tool for learners of Chinese – especially in the early days of learning.

Pinyin is a way of writing Chinese with our alphabet.

The marks over some vowels are called 'tone marks' (not 'accents'!). They are VERY helpful as they show the rise / fall (tone) of your voice. There are 4 tones in Mandarin, plus a neutral tone.

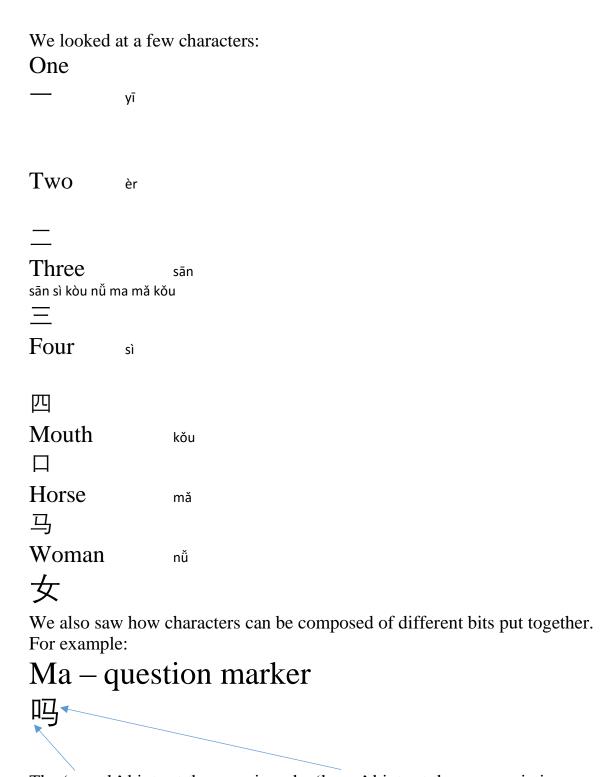
nǐ hǎo ma? = How are you?

Question marker

wŏ hĕn hǎo, xièxiè = I'm fine, thank you

xièxiè = thanks (or thank you)

= good bye (literally: 'again see')



The 'mouth' hints at the meaning, the 'horse' hints at the pronunciation

The 4 tones of Mandarin are all present in English intonation.

The first tone is like singing a high (ish note) – high and flat
The second tone rises up – as when we question something: *Huh? What?*The third tone is very low – like a very sceptical "*Really??*"
The fourth tone sounds a bit angry and falls from high to low:
"*No!*" "*Stop!*" "*Now!*"

Try them all out using the sound 'ma' or 'ba'