

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 insects

Putonghua pronunciation: *feng 1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *fung 1*

Meanings: bee

蜜蜂 (*mi4 feng1* = honey-bees) inhabit 蜂巢 (*feng1 cao2* = bee-hive). 蜂后 (*feng1 hou4* = bee-queen), 雄蜂 (*xiong2 feng1* = male-bees = drones) breed young. 工蜂 (*gong1 feng1* = worker-bees) produce 蜂蠟 (*feng1 la4* = bees-wax), 釀蜜 (*niang4 mi4* = brew-honey = make honey), have 刺 (*ci4* = stings).

蜂腰 (*feng1 yao1* = bee's-waist) means slim waist. 蜂湧而來 (*feng1 yong2 er2 zhi4* = bees-rush-and-come) describes crowds swarming forward.

Poetic lines “採得百花成蜜後 (*cai3 de2 bai2 hua1 cheng2 mi4 hou4* = pick/gather-ed-hundred-flowers-made-honey-afterwards), 為誰辛苦為誰忙? (*wei4 shei2 xin1 ku3 wei2 shei2 mang2?* = for-whom-toil-hard-for-whom-busy?)” lament: Bees/workers made life-long contributions/sacrifice, yet who has ever thanked them for their toils?

by Diana Yue