

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 looking pretty

嘴

Putonghua pronunciation: *zui3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *juj2*

Meanings: mouth

嘴 (= 口 *kou3*) is linked to 唇 (*chun2*, lips), 齒 (*ci3*, teeth), 舌 (*she2*, tongue). 饞嘴 (*can2 zui3* = lousy-for-food~mouth) = food-craving. 長舌婦 (*chang2 she2 fu4* = long-tongue~woman) = gossipy woman. Idiom 唇亡齒寒 (*chun2 man2 ci3 han2* = lips~die~teeth~cold) means state/person's collapse endangers its/his neighbor/ally.

Women apply 唇膏 (*chun2 gao1* = lip~paste/balm = lipstick), use 香水 (*xiang1 shui3* = aromatic~water = perfume) to camouflage 口臭 (*kou3 chou4* = mouth~stink = bad breath), 嫣然一笑 (*yan1 ran2 yi1 xiao4* = beautiful~ly~a~smile = flashes a charming smile).

櫻桃小嘴 (*ying1 tao2 xiao2 zui3* = cherry~fruit~little~mouth) = woman's red-lipped little mouth. 血盆大口 (*xue3 pan2 da4 kou3* = blood~basin~big~mouth) = monster's wide-open mouth showing blood-red gums.

by Diana Yue