

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 New Year resolutions

願

Putonghua pronunciation: *yuan4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yuen6*

Meanings: wish, hope, aspiration

願 = 願望 (*yuan4 wang4* = wish~look-ahead = wish), 心願 (*xin1 yuan4* = heart's~wish). 志願軍 (*zhi4 yuan4 jun1* = will~aspiration~army) = volunteer army. 許願 (*xu3 yuan4* = promise~wish) = make a wish.

Our 新年願望 (*xin1 nian2 yuan4 wang4* = new~year~wish) is 國泰民安 (*guo2 tai4 min2 an1* = country~prosper~people~safe/comfort = country prosper, people happy), 天下太平 (*tian1 xia4 tai4 ping2* = heaven~below~ultimate~calm = peace on earth), 天從人願 (*tian1 cong2 ren2 yuan4* = heaven~grants~everyone's~wishes).

If bride is 不願 (*bu4 yuan4* = un~willing), she won't say “我願意!” (*wo3 yuan4 yi4* = I~wish~idea = “I do!”) Prayer closes with 誠心所願 (*cheng2 xin1 suo3 yuan4* = honestly~heart's~wish = Amen).

by Diana Yue