

Character Builder 您好學? 呀

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 lullabies

謠

Putonghua pronunciation: *yao2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yiul*

Meaning: rhyme, folksong, ballad, rumour

謠 (radical 言 *yan2*, speech/words) = 歌謠 (*ge1 yao2* = songs-rhymes), 民謠歌手 (*min2 yao2 ge1 shou3* = folk-song-singer) plays 吉他 (*ji1 tai* = "guitar"-transliterated), 搖鼓 (*yao2 gu3* = hand-swung-drum = tambourine).

謠言 (*yao2 yan2* = rhyme-talk) = rumour. 謠傳 (*yao2 chuan2* = rumour-pass = rumour says) government collapsed, but it's just dissidents 造謠生事 (*zao4 yao2 sheng1 shi4* = make-rumour-born-event = spreading rumours, creating trouble).

Toddlers sing 童謠 (*tong2 yao2* = children's-songs/rhymes = nursery rhymes): 小鴨子, 一身黃, 一搖一擺下池塘 (*xiao3 ya1 zi0, yi1 shen1 huang2, yi1 yao2 yi1 bai3 xia4 chi2 tang2* = little-ducklings, whole-body-yellow, swaying-s swaggering-go-down-the-pond), learn that 黃 (*huang2*, yellow) rhymes with 塘 (*tang2*, pond).

by Diana Yue