

# 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:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> 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 regime change

Putonghua pronunciation: *bian4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *bin3*

Meanings: change, transform

變 = 變遷 (*bian4 qian1* = change~move-away = change of situation/status): 變好 (*bian4 hao3* = change~good = improve), 變壞 (*bian4 huai4* = change~bad = worsen). 氣候變化 (*qi4 hou4 bian4 hua4* = air~season~change~transform = climate change).

Heartless lover 變心 (*bian4 xin1* = change~heart = loves another), 變臉 (*bian4 lian3* = change~face = turns hostile). 變色 (*bian4 se1* = change~color) describes chameleon/defector or frightened/angry person's countenance turning pale/red.

人心思變 (*ren2 xin1 si1 bian4* = people's~hearts~think/wish~change) = people want change. 政變 (*zheng4 bian4* = political~change = coup) leads to 變天 (*bian4 tian1* = change~sky = weather/regime change). Dictator 以不變應萬變 (*yi3 bu4 bian4 ying4 wan4 bian4* = with~not~change~respond-to~ten-thousand~changes = makes no moves, watches developments).

by Diana Yue