

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 high-speed trains

連

(radical 辶 = boat)

Putonghua pronunciation: *lian2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *lin4*

Meanings: link, join, row, sequence

連 = link/row/sequence: 連續 (*lian2 xu2* = link~continue = continuous), 連忙 (*lian2 mang2* = link~hurried = quickly/hurriedly). 連鎖店 (*lian2 suo3 dian4* = link~chain~shops) = chain stores. 連續劇 (*lian2 xu2 ju2* = link~continue~drama) are serialized TV dramas. Story-lines have 連貫性 (*lian2 guan4 xing4* = link~through~nature = continuity). 心連心 (*xin1 lian2 xin1* = heart~join~heart) describes firm-hearted comrades/lovers. 公路 (*gong1 lu4* = public~roads = highways), 鐵路 (*tie3 lu4* = iron~road = railways), 地鐵 (*di4 tie3* = ground-iron = underground railways) 連接 (*lian2 jie2* = link up) to form 基建 (*ji1 jian4* = foundation~construction = infrastructure) networks. Railways 連線 (*lian2 xian4* = linking-up~lines), facilitating Hongkong's 連繫 (*lian2 xi4* = link~tie = communication) with Mainland's far-off regions.

by Diana Yue