

Character Builder 您好學？

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 speech-making

講

Putonghua pronunciation: *jiang3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gong2*

Meaning: talk, speak, explain, discuss, negotiate, speech, lecture

講 (radical 言 *yan2*, words) means talk/explain/discuss: 講者 (*jiang3 zhe3* = speak-er), 講師 (*jiang3 shi1* = speak-teacher = lecturer), 講故事 (*jiang3 gu4 shi0* = talk-about-past-events = tell stories), 講價 (*jiang3 jia4* = talk-price = bargain/haggle), 講和 (*jiang3 he2* = reach-peaceful-settlement).

農民講習所 (*nong2 min2 jiang3 xi2 suo3* = peasant-people's-lecture-practice-building = Guangzhou's Peasant Movement Training Institute, 1924-26) ran 講座 (*jiang3 zuo4* = talk-seat = lectures). KMT and CCP leaders 演講 (*yan3 jiang3* = perform/gave-talks), 講課 (*jiang3 ke4* = taught-lessons), 講述 (*jiang3 shu4* = spoke-on-gave-account-of) China's revolution.

Hongkong movie depicts triads 講數 (*jiang3 shu4* = Cantonese "gong2 so3" = discussing/negotiating-sums/terms) and, failing that, 講手 (*jiang3 shou3* = Cantonese "gong2 sau2" = discussing-hands = starting fight/brawl).

by Diana Yue