

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 attires

Putonghua pronunciation: *yī*

Cantonese pronunciation: *gong1*

Meanings: clothes, coating

衣 = 衣服 (*yī fu2* = clothes~wear) = clothes. Models穿衣 (*chuan1 yī* = put-on~clothes), 脫衣 (*tuō1 yī* = take-off~clothes): 內衣 (*nei4 yī* = under~wear), 毛衣 (*mao2 yī* = woollen~clothes = woolies), 大衣 (*da4 yī* = big~clothes = long coat), 嫁衣 (*jiā2 yī* = wedding~gowns). 衣著入時 (*yī zhuō4 rù4 shí2* = clothes~wear~enter~time/trends) = fashionably attired. 高級時裝 (*gāo1 jí2 shí2 zhuāng1* = high~class~trendy~wear) = haute couture. 成衣 (*chéng2 yī* = ready-made~garments = prêt-à-porter) are usually 便服 (*biàn4 fu2* = easy/casual~wear). 衣冠禽獸 (*yī guān1 qín2 shòu4* = clothes~headware~bird~beast = beast in man's attire) describes respectable-looking but hypocritical/despicable wrongdoers. 糖衣毒藥 (*táng2 yī1 dú2 yào4* = sugar~coated~poisonous~drugs) means sweet harmful lies.

by Diana Yue