

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 China's economic take-off

賺

Putonghua pronunciation: *zhuan2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *joan6*

Meanings: earn, win, make profit, gain

Ideogram 賺 shows 貝 (*bei4*, seashell/money) + 兼 (*jian1*, merge). Workers 賺取 (*zhuan4 qü3* = earn~obtain = earn) wages. 賺錢 (*zhuan4 qian2* = earn~money) means make profit or profit-making/lucrative. 生意人 (*sheng1 yi4 ren2* = live~idea-person = businessman) hopes to 賺大錢 (*zhuan4 da4 qian2* = earn/make~big~money/profit = 發大財 *fa1 da4 cai2* = burst~big-wealth = become very rich).

Tear-jerker 賺人熱淚 (*zhuan4 ren2 re4 lei4* = earn~person~hot-tears = makes people cry). Lucky guy 白賺 (*bai2 zhuan4* = white/pure~earn/win = gets profit/advantage without making effort/investment).

賺's opposite is 賠 (*pei2*, repay/make-up). 賠本生意 (*pei2 ben3 sheng1 yi4* = pay-up-live-idea) = money-losing business. Martyr 賠上 (*pei2 shang4* = pays~up) life, 賺得 (*zhuan4 de2* = gains~gets) sympathy/respect.

by Diana Yue