

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 quarrelling

Putonghua pronunciation: *fan1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *faan1*

Meanings: turn, flip, roll, overturn, upset

翻 (番 *fan1*, turn/round + 羽 *yü3*, feathers/wings) means flip over. 翻動 (*fan1 dong4* = turn-move) = stir/move. Stormy waves 翻騰 (*fan1 teng2* = roll-surge). Acrobats 翻跟斗 (*fan1 gen1 dou3* = turn-heel-bin = turn somersaults). Translator 翻閱 (*fan1 yue4* = flips-through-reads) references, 翻譯 (*fan1 yi4* = turnover-translates) documents.

翻臉 (*fan4 lian3* = turn-away-face) = break friendship/alliance. Partners fight over 翻一番 (*fan1 yi1 fan1* = turn-over-one-time = doubled) profits, 鬧翻 (*nao4 fan1* = quarrel-overturn = break up). Convicted politician appeals, 翻案 (*fan1 an4* = overturns-verdict), 翻身 (*fan1 shen1* = fan1 shen1 = turn-body = is restored/rehabilitated to respectable status). Enemies fear he might 翻舊賬 (*fan1 jiu4 zhang4* = turn-out-old-accounts = challenge them with old issues/offences).

by Diana Yue