

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 foreign currencies

增

Putonghua pronunciation: *zeng1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *jang1*

Meanings: add, increase, grow

增 is opposite of 減 (*jian3*, decrease): 增多 (*zeng1 duo1* = increase-more = grow), 減少 (*jian2 shao3* = decrease-less = shrink), 增重 (*zeng1 zhong4* = increase-weight), 減肥 (*jian3 fei2* = subtract-fat = dieting/exercising to lose weight). Central bank decides 增減 (*zeng1 jian3* = grow-shrink = varying = raising and lowering) of interest rates.

GDP's 增長 (*zeng1 zhang3* = increase-lengthen = growth) makes employment figures 倍增 (*bei4 zeng1* = one-time~ increase = double), citizen's average income 增加 (*zeng1 jia1* = increase-grow), spending power 增強 (*zeng1 qiang2* = grow~ stronger).

Travelling helps us 增廣見聞 (*zeng1 guang3 jian4 wen2* = increase-broad-see-hear = broaden our exposure/knowledge). Host welcomes guest: "Thank you for 增光!" (*zeng1 guang1* = add-light = honoring this occasion!)

by Diana Yue