

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 narcissism

Putonghua pronunciation: *ying* 3

Cantonese pronunciation: *ying* 2

Meanings: shadow

影 = shadow/shape: 人影 (*ren2 ying3* = person-shadow = indistinct human figure), 背影 (*bei4 ying3* = back-shadow = person's back-view), 黑影 (*hei1 ying3* = black/dark-shadow), 幻影 (*huan4 ying3* = fantasized/unreal-shadow). 鬼影 (*gui2 ying3* = ghost-shadow) = phantom. 剪影 (*jian2 ying3* = scissor-cut-shadow) = silhouette/vignette.

鏡子 (*jing4 zi0* = mirror-diminutive) reflects 影像 (*ying3 xiang4* = shadow-likeness = images). Calm lake has 倒影 (*dao2 ying3* = up-side-down-shadow = reflections). 影響 (*ying2 xiang3* = shadow-sound/echo = responses) = influence. Opposition party has 影子內閣 (*ying2 zi0 nei4 ge2* = shadow-diminutive-interior-attic = shadow cabinet).

Paparazzi 捕風捉影 (*bu4 feng1 zhuo1 ying3* = capture-wind-catch-shadow = pick-up unsubstantiated hearsay), 影射 (*ying3 she4* = shadow-shoot/project = allude to by innuendo) celebrities.

by Diana Yue