

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

襯

Putonghua pronunciation: *qin4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *chan3*

Meanings: match, matching, support

襯 = 襯托 (*qin4 tuo4* = match~support/raise) = match and enhance. Leaves 映襯 (*ying3 qin4* = reflect~match/highlight) flowers. 襯色 (*qin4 se1* = match~color) = color-matching.

套裝 (*tao4 zhuang1* = set~wear = suit), 襯衣 (*qin4 yi3* = match~clothes = shirt/blouse), 領帶 (*ling3 dai4* = collar~belt/string = necktie) must 相襯 (*xiang1 qin4* = mutually~match). 香奈兒 (*Xiang1 Nei4 Er2* = “Chanel”-transliterated)’s 小黑裙 (*xiao3 hei1 qun2* = Little~Black~Dress) should 配襯 (*pei4 qin4* = match~support = blend with) 手套 (*shou3 tao4* = hand~gloves), 手袋 (*shou3 dai4* = hand~bag), 飾物 (*shi1 wu4* = decorate~thing = accessories).

Supporting cast 陪襯 (*pei2 qin4* = accompany~match/enhance = serve to highlight) main actors. Frog and princess 不襯 (*bu4 qin4* = don’t~match).

by Diana Yue