

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 marriage

婚

Putonghua pronunciation: *hun1*

Cantonese pronunciation: *fan1*

Meanings: marry, marriage

結婚 (*jie2 hun1* = tie-knot~marriage = marriage) is 人生大事 (*ren2 sheng1 da4 shi4* = human-life~big~thing = important issue/event in life).

At 婚禮 (*hun1 li3* = marriage~ceremony = wedding) 新郎 (*xin1 lang2* = new~man = groom), 新娘 (*xin1 niang2* = new~woman = bride) sign 婚約 (*hun1 yue4* = marriage~covenant), exchange 結婚指環 (*jie2 hun1 zhi3 huan2* = tie-knot~marriage~finger~ring = wedding rings/bands).

Feudal China practiced 盲婚 (*mang2 hun1* = blind~marriage = arranged marriages). Modern couples 訂婚 (*ding4 hun1* = book~marriage = get engaged), sign 婚前協議 (*hun1 qian2 xie2 yi3* = marriage~before~agree~discuss = prenuptial agreements), but few 婚姻 (*hun1 yin1* = marriage~link = marriages) last till 金婚 (*jin1 hun1* = gold~marriage = gold wedding) anniversary.

by Diana Yue