

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

偶

Putonghua pronunciation: *ou3*

Cantonese pronunciation: *ngau5*

Meanings: even, pair, companion, mate, random, doll

偶 has multiple related meanings: 人偶 (*ren2 ou3* = human-doll/figurine), 木偶 (*mu4 ou3* = wooden-doll/puppet), 偶像 (*ou3 xiang4* = doll-image = idol), 偶數 (*ou3 shu4* = even-number, opposite of 奇數 *qi2 shu4* = odd-number). Hence 配偶 (*pei4 ou3* = matching/pair-figurine) means husband/wife's other half.

無獨有偶 (*wu2 du2 you2 ou3* = not-single-has-pair) describes surprisingly alike people/situations. 偶然 (*ou3 ran2* = coincidental-ly) describes coincidental/chance occurrences. Bachelor 求偶 (*qiu2 ou3* = beg/seek-mate = goes wife-hunting). Romance may develop from 偶遇 (*ou3 yu4* = random-encounter).

佳偶天成 (*jia1 ou3 tian1 cheng2* = good/beautiful-mates-heaven-complete) describes perfectly matched bride-and-groom. 怨偶 (*yuan4 ou3* = remorse/blame-mates) = mutually-intolerant, incompatible couple. 喪偶 (*sang4 ou3* = die/lose-mate) describes husband/wife whose spouse dies.

by Diana Yue