

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 cold snacks

Putonghua pronunciation: *qi4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hei3*

Meanings: steam, water vapor, gas, gaseous

汽 (radical 氵 = 水 *shui3*, water) means gas: 煤汽燈 (*mei2 qi4 deng1* = coal-gas~lamp), 汽化 (*qi4 hua4* = gas~transform = solid/liquid/water transpiring into gas/steam).

汽 also means 水蒸氣 (*shui3 zheng1 qi4* = water~steam~gas = steam/water vapor): 蒸汽機 (*zheng1 qi4 ji1* = steam engine), 蒸汽浴 (*zheng1 qi4 yu4* = steam~vapor~bath = steam bath).

可口可樂 (*ke3 kou3 ke3 le4* = “Coca Cola”-transliterated) is 汽水 (*qi4 shui3* = aerated/carbonated~water). 香檳 (*xiang1 bin1* = “Champagne”-transliterated) is 葡萄汽酒 (*pu2 tao2 qi4 jiu3* = grape~gas/vapor~wine = sparkling wine) oozing 汽泡 (*qi4 pao1* = gas/vapor~bubble = bubbles). Perrier is natural 有氣礦泉水 (*you3 qi4 kuang4 quan2 shui3* = has~gas~mine~spring~water = mineral water with gas).